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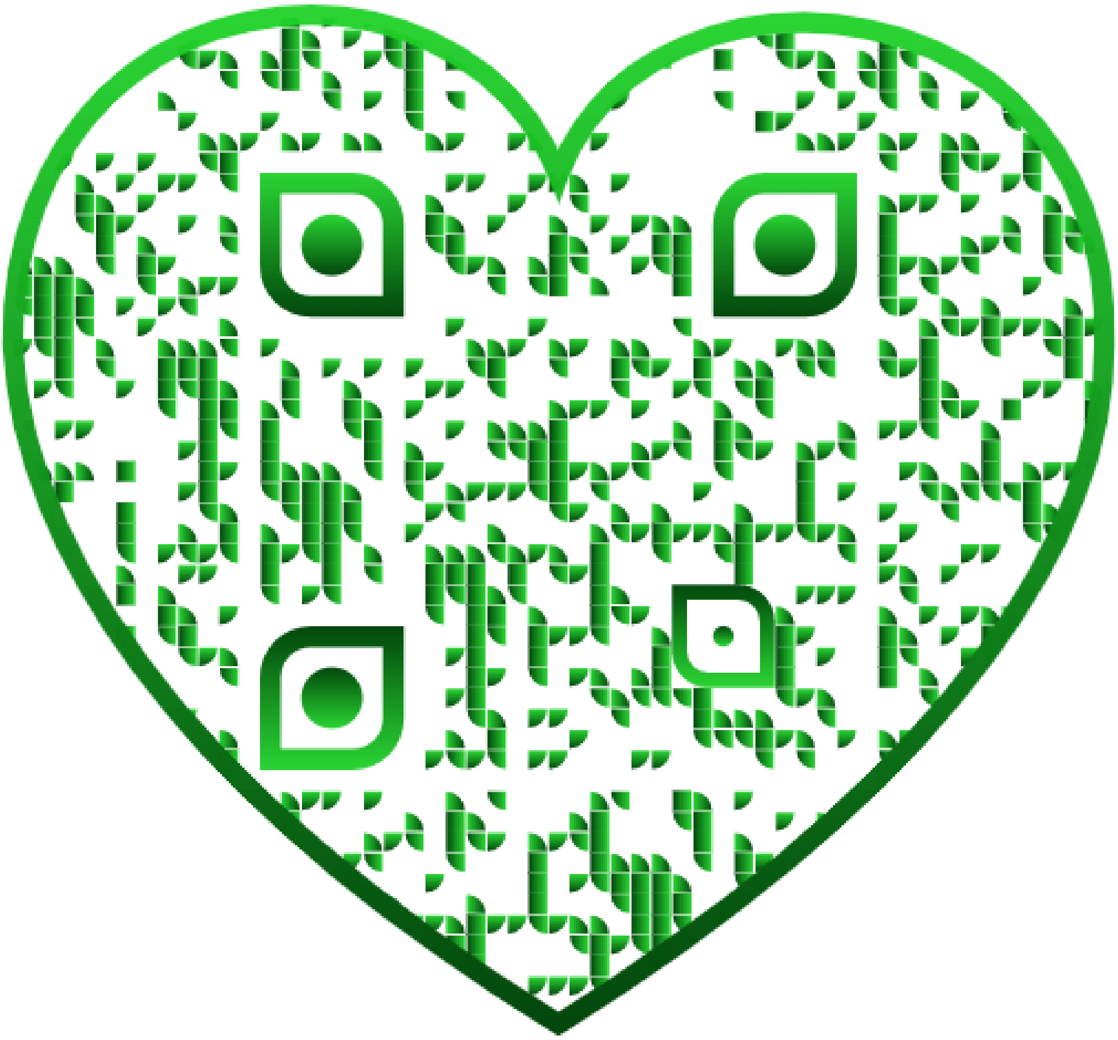

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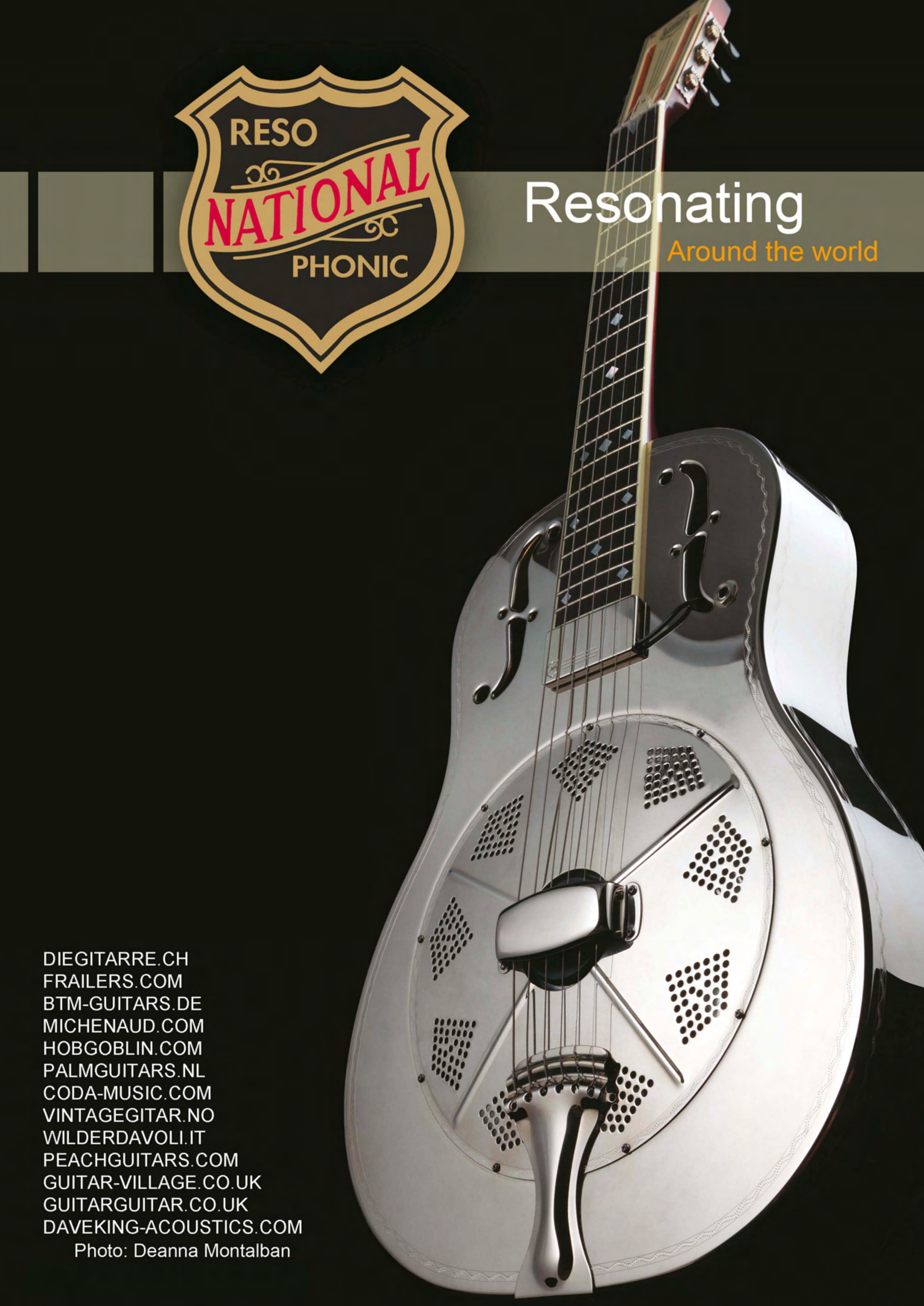
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***Acoustic* magazine is proud to support the Music Industries Association.**

A LITTLE WORD

Firstly, let me thank each one of you for your kind words about our 100th issue. The amount of emails I had about Tommy's lesson in that issue was staggering – I'm thrilled you enjoyed it. Do keep your eyes peeled for more Tommy videos going live on our YouTube page over the course of this month.

Secondly, welcome to the first edition of *Acoustic* magazine with a cover-mounted CD. If you head over to *Acoustic Presents*… (pg. 6 & 7), you'll be able to check out some of the great artists featured, including Robert Castellani, Alexander Wolfe, and Gerard Cousins, among others.

In late 2014, I was lucky enough to spend a week with Bob Taylor, Andy Powers and the rest of the Taylor Guitars team to take a trip down west coast USA as Bob built his next generation maple guitar. As a guitar-buying crowd, we're numb to the statistics of global forest loss and we live in a generation where almost all of the wood species we see in guitar building are stressed beyond belief. The MI industry accounts for only a small portion of wood harvesting globally (compared to, say, furniture makers), but someone needed to do something about it. This is where Bob Taylor comes in. Bob has, for many years, been concerned about the plight of tonewoods, and he is driven to find the necessary solutions required to preserve the future of guitar making as we see it now – and for the future of tonewoods. He, along with Andy Powers, has come up with an innovative approach to making the most sustainable acoustic guitar, a process that starts in his own backyard – the US – and stretches as far as Cameroon.

But it's not just rhetoric, Bob and his team at Taylor Guitars have set about redesigning the 600 Series to champion the use of maple as a tonewood, invested time and money into growing maple in the US Pacific Northwest, and founded one of the world's last sustainable ebony mills in Africa. We'll let Bob tell the rest of the amazing tale though (pg. 46). As well as Taylor's maple story, we've got the world exclusive review of the redesigned 600 Series that reflects Bob's idea of a guitar for the future.

Elsewhere in this issue, we've got interviews with Nashville stalwarts Lady Antebellum ahead of their Country 2 Country headline slot at the O2 arena later this year; John Renbourn and Wizz Jones talk to us about their illustrious lives within UK's folk guitar movement; and there's a truly delicious looking guitar from Breedlove with myrtlewood back and sides (pg. 64).

Enjoy the issue, the free CD, and see you next month.

Guy Little
Editor

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ACOUSTIC Presents...

15 TRACKS OF THE MONTH'S BEST NEW ACOUSTIC MUSIC

01

RJ THOMPSON

RJ Thompson is a singer-songwriter from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Having released the critically acclaimed EP *House Upon The Hill* in November 2014, RJ followed that up with a tour supporting the legendary Jools Holland throughout November and December, including a show at the Royal Albert Hall in London. RJ is no stranger to the live circuit. Earlier in his career he also toured as the support act to folk songstress Gabrielle Aplin, Sandi Thom, the Proclaimers, and songwriters Midge Ure and John Martyn. 'No Man's Land' is an anthemic foot-stomping track from the *House Upon The Hill* EP (available in all good download stores now), and is the opening track on our first ever *Acoustic Presents*. . .

www.rjthompsonmusic.com

02

ALEXANDER WOLFE

After a critically acclaimed debut (*Morning Brings A Flood*), followed by a stripped-down, intimate follow-up (*Skeletons*) the scene is set for Alexander Wolfe's third album *From The Shallows*. Having created an epic, lush and sensual collection of songs which soar and fall from one song to the next, it calls to mind the stark beauty of Nick Drake and Bon Iver, while also possessing the same warmth and tenderness of Elbow's finest moments. Accompanying musicianship on display is outstanding, with the record featuring a sublime guest backing vocals from the chart-topping singer-songwriter Gabrielle Aplin on album highlight 'Love Is All There Is'.

From The Shallows is a dynamic, emotional and ambitious record that's that is begging to be heard live and up close/

www.alexanderwolfe.co.uk

06

STEVE BONHAM AND THE BISHOP

With his album *Songsmith*, Steve Bonham is being acclaimed as "a distinctive voice producing a body of songs which challenge, intrigue and beguile." Steve writes songs that draw inspiration from an eclectic mix of acoustic and folk styles, they do not bind him. The result is unique, coherent musical individuality matched by the subject matter and lyrics of the songs. *Songsmith* is highly personal yet universal but it's no collection of restrained introspection. Songs like 'Sister Of A Dirty Moon' are full on, featuring percussion from Jim Higgins. His passionate, wry and often humorous portrayal of the human spirit in words and music, catch his audience unawares and wanting more. Steve Bonham is gigging throughout the UK as part of the ongoing *Songsmith Tour*.

www.stevebonham.net

07

JAMIE BEAU

Jamie Beau is an alternative singer-songwriter and musician hailing from Derbyshire, UK. Jamie takes influences from a broad spectrum of music, spanning alternative rock to folk, right through to classical greats. He creates a unique musical blend that excites the listener with rich dynamic playing, beautiful melody and heartfelt lyricism. Jamie uses the acoustic guitar, various percussion instruments and the Cuatro de Puerto Rico to perform solo, seeing him tour the length and breadth of the country. On record, he favours the creation of interesting, rich sonic soundscapes that intrigue and draw the listener in to experience the music. As a hardworking, independent artist, 2015 is set to be an exciting year of releasing new music and hitting the road and festival circuit.

www.jamiebeau.com

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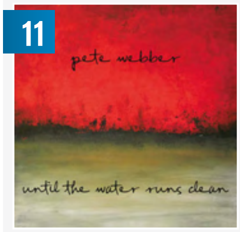


PETE WEBBER

Pete Webber is a guitarist from Bristol. From the age of 14, he was sharing stages with renowned players from the British and American acoustic scenes. At 17, he was featured in *Total Guitar Magazine*'s slide guitar issue. He plays his battered and beloved Lowden 025c in a variety of tunings and regards Skip James, Robert Johnson, Bert Jansch, Richard Thompson, John Martyn and Duane Allman as his biggest influences as a guitarist. Songwriting influences are numerous and include the Band, Neil Young, Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell. He also plays banjo and mandolin. Pete Webber's debut album *Until The Water Runs Clean* was released in November 2014 and is receiving airplay on BBC 6 Music where Tom Robinson praised the track 'Mercury' for its "acoustic guitar virtuosity [and] high-precision grooving."

www.petewebbermusic.com

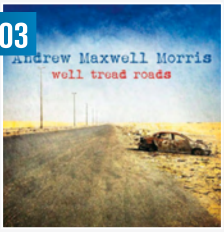
12

ROB JOHNSON

Rob Johnson is a musician from London. This track 'Eve' is taken from his second album *Throw The Sun Into The Sea*, the follow up to his debut 2009 release, *Upon a Painted Ocean* – labelled as "an instrumental album of positively momentous strength" by Revolt Magazine. *'Throw The Sun Into The Sea'* delves further into an exploration of instrumental guitar music and the ways in which this can be communicated towards an audience. Rob has played guitar in numerous bands and is influenced by a wide array of artists, composers, and filmmakers. Rob has recently played at the London Acoustic Guitar Show and at instrumental guitarist Chris Woods' London Guitar Night alongside up and coming guitar heroes such as Daryl Kellie and Robert Castellani. 2015 will see the release of a number of projects from Rob.

www.robjohnsonmusic.com

03



ANDREW MAXWELL MORRIS

Andrew Maxwell Morris balances being a singer-songwriter with a full time criminal lawyer. Andrew released his debut album *Well Tread Roads* in May 2014. It is a project that explores the highs and lows of creating music with the demands of a full time job, and was mixed and post-produced by Jordan Critz, in Dallas, USA. Andrew was born in Melbourne, Australia. His love for music began age five, placed at a piano and brought into the world of traditional folk music. He wrote his first song at 12, taught himself the drums and guitar when he was 13. Songwriting always came easy. He developed a love of 1970s Laurel Canyon artists – James Taylor, Jackson Browne, the Eagles – and later a fascination with Bob Dylan, Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen.

www.andrewmaxwellmorris.com

04

FRED'S HOUSE

Fred's House is an award-winning band based in Cambridge, UK, mixing elements of folk, blues, and country. The songs feature the vocal harmonies of songwriting duo Griff Jameson and Vikki Gavin, enriched with a third part harmonies from bassist Gafyn Jameson (Griff's brother), guitar playing from Lachlan Golder, and drummer Paul Richards. Among their many influences are bands such as Fleetwood Mac and CSNY. Fred's House has become a regular fixture on the UK festival scene, as well having supported the likes of Eddi Reader, Ward Thomas and Lucy Rose. The band has received national airplay on BBC 6Music, and BBC Radio Wales. Fred's House's released debut album *Bonnie And Clyde* in 2014 to critical acclaim, grabbing four- and five-star reviews across the board.

www.fredshousemusic.co.uk

05

GERARD COUSINS

With *The First Beat is the Last Sound,* classically trained guitarist Gerard Cousins has taken inspiration from a huge range of influences both reflecting and fusing the traditional music of his homeland (Wales) with his love of jazz, Indian classical music, and the compositional processes of the American minimalist composers Steve Reich, Philip Glass and Terry Riley. Gerard demonstrates a new style for the nylon-strung guitar, instantly likeable but not shallow, reflecting a 21st century approach to writing which bonds different worlds of music not as gimmickry but as an authentic expression of a guitarist who has toured the world geographically as well as musically and wants to take his listeners on the journey with him exploring new sonic territories.

www.gerardcousins.com

08

JESS AND THE BANDITS

Country music really is a powerful thing. It unites fans, and it brings bands together. Jessica Clemmons, the singer-songwriter from Houston, Texas, bonded with the four Brits who make up the Bandits over their mutual love of music. Now they're turning that shared affection into some of the most accessible country-pop of the year. From the stage of the Country 2 Country Festival at London's 02 Arena, to the support they've won from BBC Radio 2, the band has also played a string of festivals this year including the Isle Of Wight Fest and a Wembley arena debut. Now, at the helm of the five-piece band, Jessica Clemmons is ready to take things up a notch. 'We've got a little of that country-rock feel, and then we've got those pretty country ballad sort of songs,' says Jess.

www.jessandthebandits.com

09

JUSTIN BERNASCONI

Justin Bernasconi performs original tunes, infused with exciting, tasteful acoustic guitar playing with influences ranging across folk, bluegrass, ragtime and blues. 2014 saw the release of Bernasconi's debut solo album *Winter Pick*, recorded and produced by Jeff Lang in Melbourne, Australia, showcasing a considerable grasp of both British and American folk guitar styles. Taking inspiration from John Fahey, Doc Watson and Richard Thompson, the album has been described by Australian Guitar Magazine, as "a dextrous display of picking that does a stellar job of treading the fine line between guitar showboating and tasteful melodies… (*Winter Pick*) justifies his position as one of this country's most interesting acoustic guitar talents".

www.justinbernasconsi.com

10

OWEN MOORE

Busker Owen Moore is a well-travelled musical veteran. The Irish-born street singer has become a familiar figure in many of the towns around his home on the Dorset coast and over the years he has developed into a writer of novel, quirky songs with engaging themes, intriguing words and memorable tunes. His original songs have featured on radio shows in the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, Australia, New Zealand and in the USA. On all of his recordings, Owen plays all the instruments himself and his guitar of choice is a battered Fender Malibu, which dates from when Owen first started playing, back in the 1960s. Owen's four albums of all-original material are *Windswept Songs On A Broken Guitar*, *Rainy Day Songs*, *Simplicated Songs*, and his latest album *Short Songs From Thin Air*.

www.owenmooremusic.com

13

ROBERT CASTELLANI

Robert Castellani is an instrumental acoustic guitarist and composer based in Suffolk. His style draws from many influences including folk, rock, blues and classical music. His playing incorporates percussive sounds on the body of the guitar, altered tunings, harmonics and tapping combined in a style similar to the likes of Jon Gomm and Eric Roche. He has been nominated three times for the national 'Guitarist Of The Year' award and was also noted in *Acoustic Guitar* magazine's list of 30 of the world's great guitarists under the age of 30. 2014 saw the release of *Stickman* that features many original acoustic fingerstyle pieces and arrangements. He is an experienced composer and has written music for orchestra, piano trio, solo violin and solo piano among other works.

www.robertcastellani.com

14

IVOR GAME

Ivor Game is a singer-songwriter from Middlesex. He started playing the guitar from the age of 10 and writing his songs soon after. Ivor found his feet playing the acoustic clubs of London and has been touring his tuneful shows across the UK and beyond for many years. He often tours Ireland, parts of Europe and has performed in Nashville and Los Angeles. Ivor has been releasing an album every two years since 1996's *Hit The Big Time*, and in 2014 he released his 10th album *Dizzy Spells*. Ivor's music has been broadcast across the world, from Europe to Australia, Japan and the USA. BBC 6 Music's Tom Robinson has played Ivor a few times on his Saturday night show.

www.ivorgame.com

15

STEVE DREWETT

Steve Drewett is perhaps better known as the singer-songwriter, guitarist, and frontman with the punk band Newtown Neurotics, with whom he has released a total of four albums and eight singles. This year, however, Steve has released his first solo acoustic album *KuJenga Society*.The title of the album *KuJenga* (from the Swahili "to build") *Society* refers to the withdrawing of community resources in these times of austerity, as being like the popular Jenga game, where you slowly withdraw wooden blocks until the tower collapses. The songs on the album display a range of styles from protest songs, love songs, dark songs and even a Christmas song. Steve now intends to tour as a solo act when not working with the band. His new album is available from Amazon.

www.steve-drewett.com

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The seven-time Grammy-winning Nashville trio fly into the UK with their latest album *747* ready to headline the O2 arena for the biggest country music bash this side of the Atlantic: Country 2 Country 2015.

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20 MIKE DAWES

One of the more meteoric journeys to fame in the past couple of years has been that of Mike Dawes – from freshly graduated music student to celebrated virtuoso fingerstylist and member of Justin Hayward's touring band on a roller-coaster ride that has seen him play all over the world. We caught him in between tours for a quick chat…

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After 20 years in the music business and nine studio albums before their anniversary album *Who We Are*, Chris While and Julie Matthews are veritable veterans of the UK folk scene. *Acoustic* chats to them about Fylde Guitars, co-writing, and what's next for the duo.

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Two of the UK's folk guitar legends, John Renbourn and Wizz Jones, tell Julian Piper about their early days on the hard road to Marrakech

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The California singer-songwriter has just released his album *Smoke and Mirrors* in the UK, so *Acoustic* caught up with him to talk about Martin Guitars, the Californian mountains, and finding creativity in insecurity.

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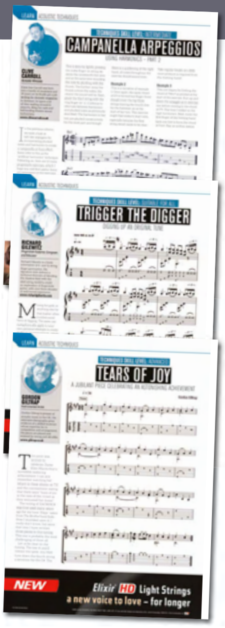

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BEDELL GUITARS

INTRODUCES TONEWOOD CERTIFICATES

Every Bedell to include a plant and animal listing documenting materials used

Tonewoods used in all Bedell Guitars are legally acquired, in accordance with all domestic and international regulations, including Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and Lacey Act, and have verified supporting documentation. Bedell Guitars will never knowingly use any tonewood from clear-cut trees.

Each guitar sold currently comes with a unique journal showing the location of where the wood was sourced as well as all chain of custody documentation. It also depicts the story and inspiration behind the design of the guitar.

'The journals have been an amazing way to share the inspiration behind the design of the guitar,' says Tom Bedell, founder of Bedell Guitars. 'I have a blast going out into the forests and finding cool, beautiful and salvaged or reclaimed trees and then coming back to Bend, Oregon, and designing amazing sounding instruments.'

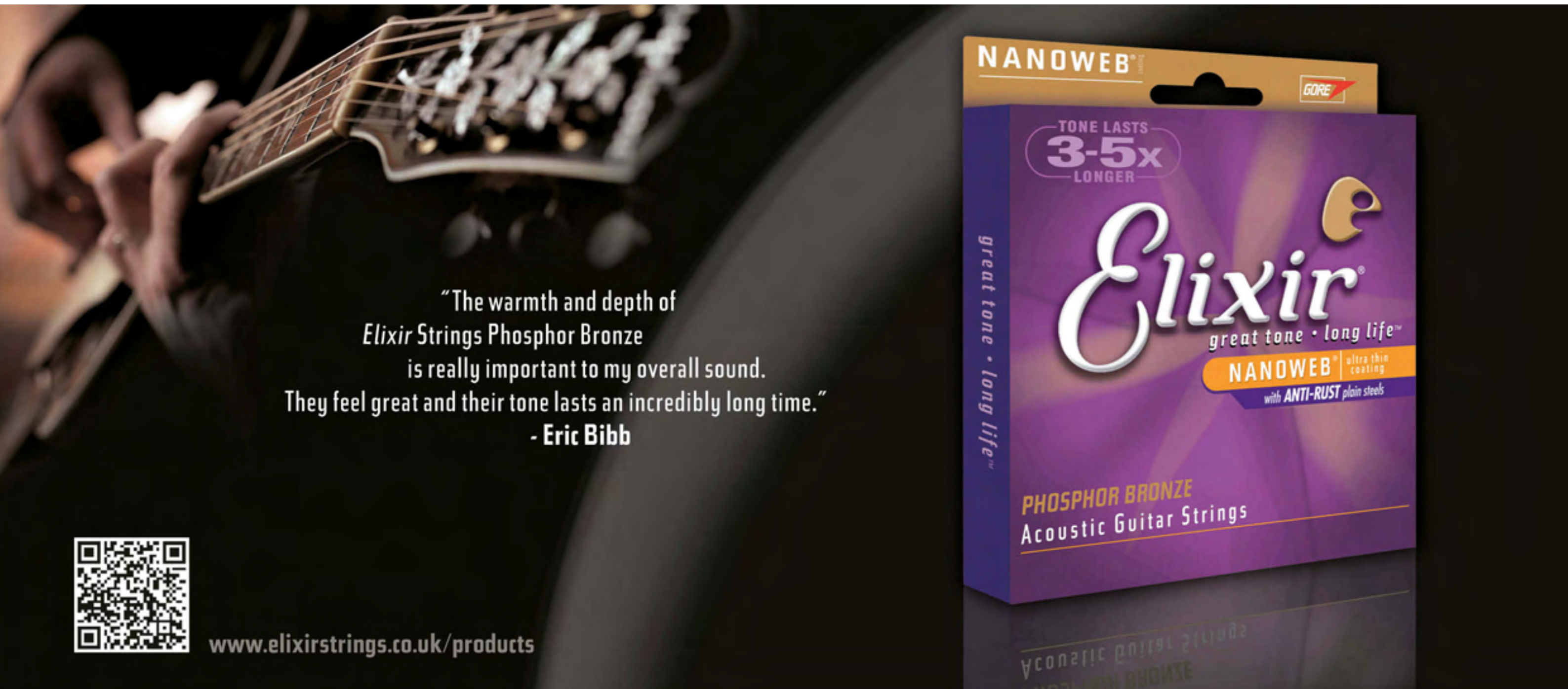
From January 2015, every Bedell guitar will include a plant and animal listing which will state the common name, scientific name, and country of origin for the tonewood and animal parts used.

'Across the globe, growing demand for hardwood products is fueling illegal logging that threatens some of the world's most vulnerable native hardwoods forests. Unfortunately, it's often difficult for consumers to know whether the wood in the products they buy comes from legal, sustainable sources,' says US fish and wildlife service director Dan Ashe. 'Bedell Guitars, through its tonewood certificate, shows that it is dedicated to ensuring that its customers can make informed, environmentally conscious choices about the instruments they buy and we commend them for their superb commitment to sustainability.'

For guitars containing woods that are regulated under CITES they will also contain information on Bedell's Wood Concierge service. Bedell Guitars promises that any Brazilian rosewood guitars they sell can travel the world and if it can't – they'll buy it back. To make it even easier, they have a team dedicated to help consumers with the proper permitting they need to travel and/or purchase instruments with Brazilian tonewoods.

'The Bedell Tonewoods Certificate is included with each instrument so customs officials can more clearly identify the woods and verify if they require additional paperwork. We will also help with the paperwork and necessary information for travel so you can be at ease,' concludes Bedell.

For more info: ***www.bedellguitars.com***



GIBSON UNVEILS TWO BOB DYLAN SIGNATURE SJ-200 ACOUSTICS

Autographed collector's edition pays tribute to legendary songwriter

After years of design and development overseen by the artist's personal guidance, the Bob Dylan Autographed SJ-200 Collector's Edition is an exact replica of Bob's personal highly customised SJ-200 fashioned from highly figured Indian rosewood and AAA Sitka spruce. The headstock features the artist's eye logo inlaid in mother-of-pearl with a Bella Voce mother-of-pearl inlay in the fretboard. The double pick guards are ornately decorated with an inlay of abalone. Each model features a label autographed by Bob Dylan and is numbered in the series on the head block. Only 175 guitars will be made and distributed for worldwide sales. These guitars will also include a unique limited edition hardshell case with embroidered artist's eye logo.

The Bob Dylan SJ-200 Player's Edition translates Bob's SJ-200 into a stellar instrument for today's performing artist, creating a guitar that marries the deep tradition of the "king of the flat tops" with the finest tonewoods and elegant appointments. A body of flamed maple back and sides and Adirondack spruce top in vintage sunburst finish is dressed in multi-ply binding, ornate double pickguards, and traditional moustache bridge. The flamed three-piece maple neck with rosewood stringer carries a select rosewood fingerboard with pearl Bella Voce inlays, and a bound headstock with pearl Gibson logo, Bob Dylan eye logo decal. An L.R. Baggs Anthem pickup lets you take the guitar straight from studio to stage, and it all comes protected in a fitted hardshell case with a plush purple lining.

The Bob Dylan Autographed Collector's Edition retails for £7,199, while the Bob Dylan Player's Edition retails for £3,499.

For more info and to find out who your local Gibson Guitars dealer is, visit: **www.gibson.com**

FISHMAN ANNOUNCES NEO-BUSTER PICKUP AND TONEDEQ PREAMP

Neo-Buster is tech giant's latest "feedback fighting" soundhole pickup

Fishman has announced the ToneDEQ Acoustic Instrument Preamp and Neo-Buster Soundhole Pickup Feedback Buster, available to customers beginning early 2015. The ToneDEQ Acoustic Preamp with effects combines a preamp, dual effects section, tone controls, a compressor, level booster with a balanced DI in one device, and the Neo-Buster combines Fishman's Neo-D single coil pickup with a feedback-fighting soundhole cover.

The ToneDEQ boasts end-to-end analogue circuitry from preamp to output with digital effects mixed in parallel to maintain signal purity. A low noise 1/4 inch amplifier output and XLR DI output with automatic ground-lifting and selectable pre/post EQ settings are also included. A discrete Fishman Class A preamp with a high impedance input aims to improve performance for any passive instrument pickup, with a four-band equaliser design allowing tone control for any acoustic instrument with a low cut filter to reduce sub-bass effects.

The Neo-Buster combines Fishman's Neo-D Single Coil pickup with an integrated soundhole cover that reduces the build-up of energy inside the soundhole that often leads to uncontrollable 'howling' during high volume situations. This single coil magnetic soundhole pickup shares the same neodymium magnet structure as the Fishman Rare Earth pickup. Its low profile, high impedance design requires no battery and can be installed in most standard acoustic guitars without any need for alterations.

Fishman's ToneDEQ will retail at $461.46 (approx. £299) and the Neo-Buster will be $99.95 (approx. £59).

For more information and to check stockists, visit Fishman's website: ***www.fishman.com***

WIN!
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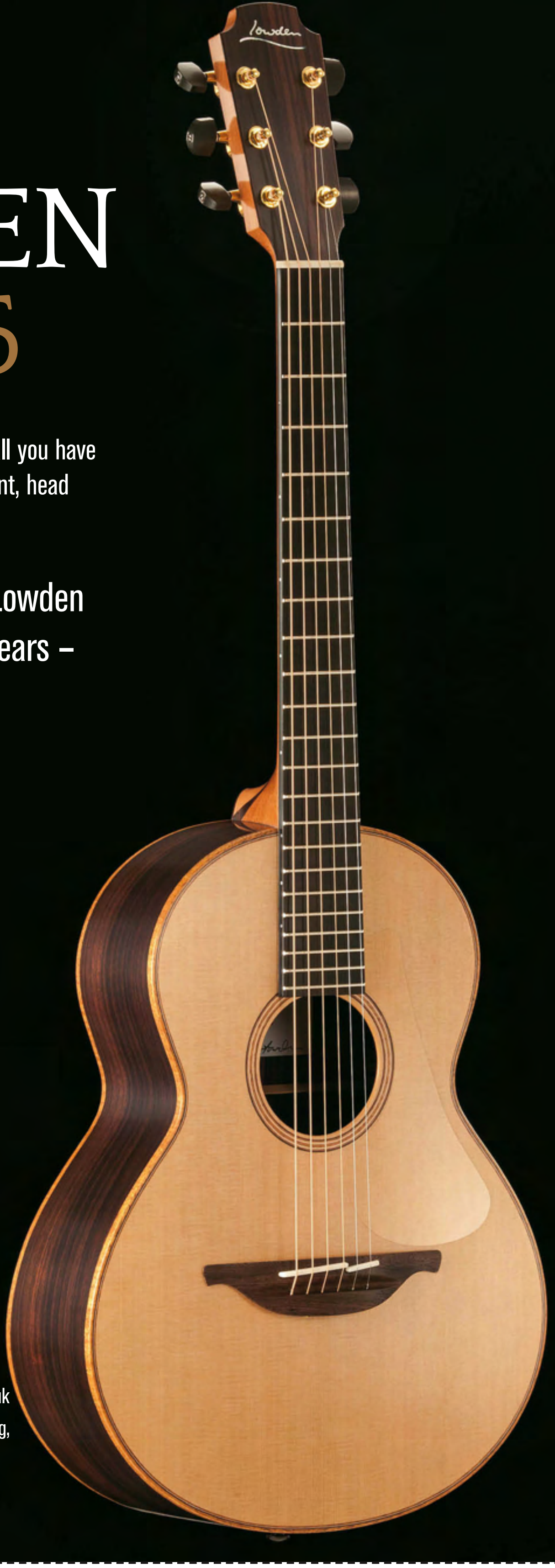

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ASK THE EXPERTS

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INCREASING YOUR FEES AS A WORKING MUSICIAN

As the cost of living continues to rise, negotiating a good rate of pay is more important than ever. But how can you go about raising your rates when it's challenging enough to raise the subject in the first place?

IT'S OKAY TO TALK ABOUT MONEY

Broaching the subject of payment shows that you value what you do. It's worth trying to get this right from the beginning. Practise your approach. Try rehearsing what you plan to say out loud until you can deliver it with confidence. Money can be hard to talk about.

'Give yourself the okay to talk about money,' says Dave Webster, MU national organiser for live performance. 'Be very straightforward and make sure you have your business hat on when you have this conversation.'

This applies whether you're dealing with an industry professional who has similar discussions on a daily basis, or a member of the public who has never booked a band before. It's a business transaction either way, so be sure to treat it like one.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Your rates should rise as your reputation grows, but asking a happy client for more money can feel risky. The trick is to approach the subject in a way that makes you sound reasonable. It can help to cite external factors such as inflation, so do your research first.

'The Retail Price Index is a good benchmark for increasing your fees,' says Dave. 'It's also useful to look at any rises in fuel prices and to be aware of what other musicians are earning.' The MU's suggested minimum rates are a useful starting point. They can be found at theMU.org or by contacting your regional MU office.

Try to see the fee from the client's perspective. If they've suggested a price, they're unlikely to have plucked it from thin air. If it's a function, what's the overall budget? If you are booking a gig, will there be room to manoeuvre after the venue has covered its costs? And when there's a middle man involved, it helps to know how big a cut they're taking.

BE TRANSPARENT

People are less likely to feel short-changed if they understand what they are paying for, so it's a good idea to keep things as transparent as possible – especially if you work in education.

'Whoever engages you, whether schools or parents, they need to know what they are paying for,' says Dianne Widdison, MU national organiser for education & training. 'Being open about your charges and policies will encourage professionalism on both sides.'

Remember to differentiate between the price you charge and the amount of profit you'll see after taking off tax, travel and other costs, as well as factoring in the time commitment involved.

We all want to get paid fairly, but talking about money can be hard. For more advice on negotiating a better fee, and any other aspect of your career as a musician, get in touch via ***www.theMU.org***

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With Paul Strange

LOUISE ORFILA

STYLE… (SINGER-SONGWRITER)

I'm in Orfila with my older brother Matt and younger sister Abi. It's acoustic/folk/pop, with hints of country. Matt plays guitar, banjo, harmonica, ukulele and sings, Abi plays piano, guitar, drums and sings, and I play guitar, piano and sing. I was a solo artist for several years before we decided it would be fun to work together as a sibling trio, combining our love for music and songwriting. A favourite memory of recording our debut album *Writing On The Wall* was the session with Liam Genochy [Steeleye Span's drummer] and Colin Gibson [bass]. This was when we heard our music come to life and take shape. The album is honest, reflected by songs about heartbreak and unrequited love. I play an Ashbury acoustic/electric with a Fishman pickup. Comfortable to play, the sound is beautiful with a warm tone. I use an Ashton DI via a Solton PA. I hear melodies in my head, combine them with chords, and think up lyrics. Then I play it to my brother and sister and we come up with the harmonies. I'm self-taught and can play enough chords to write songs. Newton Faulkner's guitar playing is incredible. Last year, we played alongside Faulkner, The Script, and Roger Hodgson at the Gibraltar Music Festival 2014. It was an incredible experience, especially as our band was expanded with musicians including Jamie Crompton, who used to play with Suzi Quatro and Wishbone Ash. We're currently working on new material and we're looking forward to the things we have planned this year.

www.orfila-music.com

KENNETH J NASH

STYLE… (SINGER-SONGWRITER)

My music is a mixture of folk, country and soul, with a dark edge. I use my own life experiences to write songs that I find cathartic and hopefully of use to those suffering from similar experiences. On my latest album, *The Fall Of Eden*, I recorded all my parts as live takes and added the other guys as overdubs. This meant six months of travelling to record them in their own homes, but I loved every mile and every take. There's nothing better than hearing other musicians embellish your work with beauty. 'Slow Burn' is my favourite song as it came together easily. I have an Auden Chester Cedar Full Body. It's responsive, a delight to play and sounds heavenly for my style of playing. For gigging I tend to use the Auden, but sometimes I use an Epiphone Emperor. For recording, I mainly use the Auden. I also have a resonator, a flamenco nylon-strung, an old Fender Telecaster, and a Les Paul copy. An acoustic is how I start my songwriting. Sometimes I begin with a poem, put together a melody, and then find the chords; or sometimes I'll have a chord progression and then develop a melody and lyrics latterly. Apart from lessons in my teens, I'm self-taught, and play fingerstyle. My acoustic guitar heroes are Mark Geary, Nick Drake, Damien Rice, Bert Jansch, Davey Graham and my uncle Ian Cruickshank. I have several projects on the go, including an album of original duets with my backing singer Fran Taylor, a new solo LP and a band project. I'm busy with festivals throughout the summer, and I also have plans to play New York, Berlin and Amsterdam in 2015.

www.kennethjnash.com

IAN CARR

STYLE… (SINGER-SONGWRITER)

I've spent my life being a bossy sideman or a member of bands, telling everybody what to do, so the question was, what happens when I have to make all the decisions? That's why my debut album is entitled *Who He?* It's me saying to myself, "Come on then, let`s see who you are, show your colours!" My music is lighthearted and psychedelic. The record is a celebration of my mum's life. I play a Collings D3 acoustic, made in the 1990s. It's deep, rich, loud and lovely. I have an LR Baggs Duet system through a Baggs preamp, with a DPA mic on the front of the guitar. I also use my wife's Spanish guitar and an Ibanez Artcore electric. My songs start with a phrase going around my head and after some years, it`s a song. I find touring relaxing, so lots of tunes happen then. I use dropped D tuning often and, more recently, CGCGCE. Acoustic guitar heroes? 'Peerie' Willie Johnston from Shetland, Richard Dawson from Newcastle, a fantastic Madagascan guitarist called D'Gary, and Joseph Spence from the Bahamas. Martin Simpson was a big influence, as was Richard Thompson, and of course Django. I'm working on three projects – a new Ian Carr and the Various Artists record, a collaboration with Kris Drever, and a new record of my Swedish folk music trio Sandén-Nygårds-Carr. The latter is not as far-fetched as it sounds as I live in Dalarna, Sweden. I'm gigging and recording in the spring, and then in May I'm touring with Eddi Reader. In the summer I hope to play festival gigs with Ian Carr and the Various Artists, and then in September it's Kris Drever and Ian Carr.

www.iancarrguitar.com

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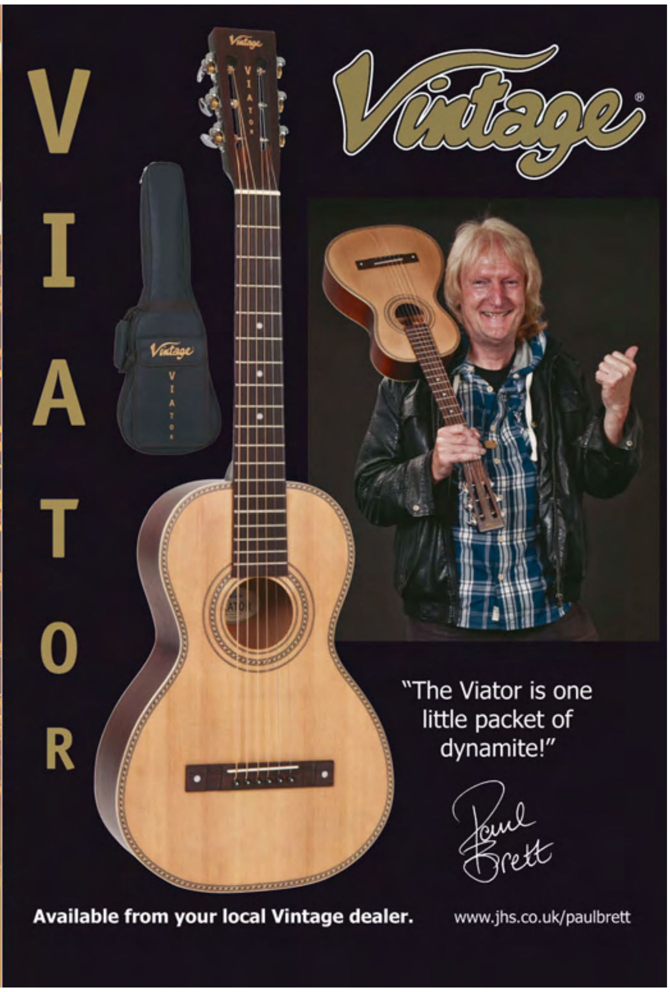
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MARTY DODSON WAS AN ASPIRING SONGWRITER. ONE DAY, HE DECIDED TO HAMMER A NAIL INTO A WALL. "THIS IS WHERE I WILL HANG MY FIRST GOLD RECORD," HE DECLARED—WHICH WAS A BOLD PROCLAMATION, ESPECIALLY COMING FROM A GUY WHOSE NEXT BEST OPTION WAS A JOB WRITING TOASTER MANUALS. FOR SIX LONG YEARS HE WALKED BY THAT EMPTY NAIL. AND SO DID HIS WIFE AND THREE KIDS. THIS TOOK GUTS. PARTICULARLY AFTER EATING MASHED POTATOES COVERED IN 69-CENT GRAVY. BUT MARTY PERSEVERED. FOCUSED ON SUCCESS. UNTIL ONE DAY, A GOLD RECORD HUNG ON THAT NAIL, AND THEN A PLATINUM NEXT TO IT. HIS STORY REMINDS US THAT THE WORLD COULD USE MORE DREAMERS LIKE MARTY. FOR MORE ON MARTY AND OTHER STORIES OF COURAGE THAT INSPIRE US, *visit taylorguitars.com*

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OPEN MIKE

WORDS: DAVID MEAD
IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

One of the more meteoric journeys to fame in the past couple of years has been that of Mike Dawes – from freshly graduated music student to celebrated virtuoso fingerstylist and member of Justin Hayward's touring band on a roller-coaster ride that has seen him play all over the world. We caught him in between tours for a quick chat…

It might seem that playing the fame game is a very different affair in the 21st Century. Thanks to the internet, social media and, most importantly, YouTube, it's possible to go from zero to hero virtually overnight. No more slogging away in clubland for years in the hope that one day your luck will change. Today, it's all down to online marketing and an entirely different kind of entrepreneurship. But has that much really changed? You still need a formidable degree of talent, mixed with a good business sense, tireless dedication and some good old-fashioned luck. This has certainly been the case with Mike Dawes and we thought we should examine his explosion onto the scene in close-up detail. It all started with a video…

'I was working in a duo and when that disbanded, the only song I had that was an actual solo piece was this cover of Gotye's 'Somebody I Used To Know'. I approached CandyRat Records to see if they'd put the video on their channel and I think they were initially reluctant as that song was one of the most played in the world at that point. But they took a chance on it and it instantly went viral and from then on the guitar community was emailing me en masse asking, "where's the album?" I didn't have any more songs and it was terrifying because suddenly I felt that I had this opportunity to go for the whole playing guitar for a living thing, but I didn't have any more material. Fortunately, people began to make me offers of tours in various European countries. So I postponed all of those for the following year when I assumed that I would have an album and just buried myself in the studio with a guitar until I finished the first CD, called *What Just Happened?* I guess the title was appropriate in view of the manic nature of everything that had actually happened at that point,' Mike says.

How difficult was it to get material together for the album under pressure?
At that time there was so much negative and positive energy in my brain; the reason why I did the Gotye track was because I suddenly found myself without direction. I was studying at university and putting all my eggs in one musical basket and as soon as I graduated, that basket disappeared. As any guitarist will know, inspiration comes out of things like that; it's normally doom and gloom that inspires music. So it was a really inspiring time because I had such a mixed emotional thing going on. I was still incredibly lost and looking for some sort of direction, but at the same time I was so happy that the one piece of output that I had produced was so well received. The album came out on April 9 [2013] and the first show was in Germany on April 13 and I've really been on the road ever since. I've been to Australia, Asia, Europe, America and I'm about to do my fifth tour of the USA.

How has touring been for you?
I love travelling, I love playing the guitar and I love playing in front of people. I'm a bit of a control freak when it comes to my own business and so I do all my own bookings, my website, flights, going to the post office to post the merch – it's all a one man operation and there really is no outside assistance there, with the exception of CandyRat who has very kindly put my stuff out there online. So I just got the bug and whereas people consider me as a professional guitarist, I consider myself to be a professional email writer, because I spend about 80 per cent of my time writing emails, five per cent eating and the other 15 per cent playing guitar. That's what a musician nowadays has to be really.

And, of course, touring isn't always plain sailing, is it?
Most of the time the gigs have been surprisingly smooth, even in places like China where people don't really speak English, the gigs all managed to happen,

albeit with a few technical hitches along the way. I was in Italy recently, and people from the UK picture Italy as a sunny, glamorous kind of place, but within about five seconds of stepping off a bus onto Italian soil in Pisa I got caught in the most torrential downpour I've ever encountered in my life – with all my gear. Then I had my wallet stolen by a pickpocket and a few days later the merch set on fire at a concert in Rome! I have some song download cards that I sell and they all went up in flames because they were too near a candle.

What sort of gear do you take out on the road with you?
I have three pickups in my Nick Benjamin guitar: a DiMarzio Angel magnetic pickup, an LR Baggs Dual Source under-saddle and mic combination. These three run out of two outputs via a cable which is stereo and mono cables at one end split into three mono cables at the other. So each pick-up goes into a separate channel of a Bose T1 mixer where they are all EQ'd. From there I have two outputs: one goes to straight to one of the stereo inputs of my looper, which is the last unit in my chain, while the other goes through all of my effects units and finally meets in the looper. So essentially I have one completely dry, completely pure guitar sound and one wet, effected guitar sound meeting in the looper and that goes out stereo to the front of house.

What other bits of gear do you have on your pedalboard?
After the mixer I have an Electro-Harmonix Freeze pedal, which is a really cool unit that acts as a sort of sustainer; as long as you're holding the button on the pedal, whatever you were playing before just gets sustained. So you can create some really interesting harmonies with yourself, which is great for creating as big a sound as possible when it's just you on stage. Then I have an octave pedal, the Boss OC-3, which is the best octave pedal I've tried because it has the polyphonic setting so that you confine the octave to just the bass strings, which is really useful. I have a wah pedal by Zvex called the Wah Probe, which is almost like a Theremin on the floor in that it's a proximity sensor so you don't actually touch the pedal, you just get close to it and create your wah and filter sweep sounds. Then I go into a Strymon Timeline which meets at the DigiTech JamMan XT Express looper.

So what does the immediate future hold for you?
A while ago I was contacted by Adam Beaumont at Leafcutter Studios who wanted to put together an all-encompassing guitar tuition aid for guitarists of all ages and abilities for the iPad. I've done the percussive acoustic guitar app and then there's one that focuses on my song 'Boogie Shred' and we are looking forward to doing some more. Then I'm off out touring for the rest of 2015; I leave for Germany in a few days and then I'm in the States for six weeks for a Justin Hayward tour, at the end of which I'm staying on to do some headline shows including my first show in New York City at The Iridium, the legendary jazz club, then I'm off to Madrid for a concert and masterclass. Next year I'm planning some more adventures including my first trip to Bermuda and the Dominican Republic, among others. There's also going to be a lot of time to really get into writing the second album and I'm hoping to have that out by the end of 2015.

What advice do you have for young players who are trying to break through at the moment?
One big piece of advice is that every gig matters. You can play your worst gig in the world to one man and his dog and that one man can give you your dream session gig. For example, I played my least favourite gig ever where I broke a nail in the first song, the fire alarm went off and I had a song cut short… I was opening for Seth Lakeman in 2009 and I was the first of two support acts, the other was a great singer-songwriter called Karima Francis and it just so happened that Justin Hayward is a huge fan of hers. So when he needed a guitar player she said that she remembered me from back in 2009, and suggested that he check me out and that's how I got that gig. So it had nothing to do with any viral video or any YouTube stuff, it was just because one person happened to take away something positive from the worst gig I've ever done.

Mike Dawes' What Just Happened? *is out now. For his up-to-date touring schedule, visit his website.*
www.mikedawes.co.uk

After 20 years in the music business and nine studio albums before their anniversary album Who We Are, Chris While and Julie Matthews are veritable veterans of the UK folk scene. Acoustic chats to them about Fylde Guitars, co-writing, and what's next for the duo.

CHRIS WHILE & JULIE MATTHEWS

WORDS: PAUL STRANGE

Twenty years is a long time for any musicians to work together. For singer-songwriters and multi-instrumentalists Chris While and Julie Matthews – who first met when they were members of The Albion Band – the two decades have brought great success, but it hasn't always been plain sailing. As well as their musical collaboration, they became life partners for 11 years. However, despite working through a separation, they've persevered and their creative musical partnership continues to flourish.

In fact, 20 years on, they seem stronger than ever as their latest album *Who We Are* confirms. Blending exquisite lyrics with a peerless blend of acoustic folk, country, pop and folk-rock, it's a deceptively deep and thoughtful offering. Above all, the album says much about the respect that they have for each other as musicians and friends, with big smiles from them both on its front cover.

Those smiles are much in evidence as the duo chat about their enduring musical partnership. It began when Julie – the daughter of a Sheffield steel worker who had been with the Albions for three years – decided to leave the band to pursue other projects. Albion leader Ashley Hutchings was looking for a replacement when Julie chanced upon Chris – a solo artist from Lancashire – at a folk festival in 1993.

'I stood at the back of the room and my jaw dropped,' says Julie. 'I thought, "Wow, she's fantastic." So I went and got Ashley and said, "You need to come and hear this woman sing, she's astounding." He was blown away.'

To help Chris settle in to the Albions, Julie stayed on for a while. 'I got to work with her on a project and we connected musically,' says Julie. 'I remember Ashley coming over with his then partner Julie Dunlop, and she said, "Ashley, we've just discovered a new duo" and that was the beginning of it,' says

who, in order to get my songs heard, sings them,' says Julie. 'I believe Chris has made me a better singer. Through her, I've raised my game.'

'My songwriting has also been raised,' says Chris, 'so it's a magical mix, because we give each other what the other one needs musically. Julie is an exceptional rhythm guitarist. I'm a picker, and so the mix is great.'

'I'm also a pianist,' says Julie. 'Chris's voice lends itself to a piano ballad. One of my big passions is writing piano ballads for Chris to sing.'

They knew *Who We Are* was going to be an important statement for their 20th year in music. 'I felt we had to do something special,' says Julie. 'The pressure was there to come up with it. It's your 20th year and you don't want to disappoint.'

The album features four of Julie's compositions, three from Chris, and four joint songs. Julie's 'If This Were Your Last Day' – the album's bright and breezy opener – ponders someone's final moments.

'I hit 50 last year,' says Julie. 'I wanted to reflect the fact that sometimes we're waiting for things to happen, and actually it's about now – you have to take each day and seize it.'

She wrote the song on her gouzouki – a bouzouki with a guitar's body. 'It's what I play when I want something a bit rocky,' says Julie. 'And I wanted it to be a hard-hitting song.'

'Heaven Is Changing' – an achingly beautiful ballad – was written by Chris, inspired by a visit to Eyam in Derbyshire. The village suffered a bubonic plague outbreak in 1665. 'The local draper ordered some cloth from London and it was infested by fleas that were carrying the plague,' says Chris. 'The pastor got all the villagers together and said, "We have to sacrifice ourselves for the rest of the country. We cannot leave the village." And they didn't. They contained the plague.' More than 270 people died there. It's an inspirational story and the song has touched a lot of people,' says Chris.

Julie's 'Dancing Under The Gallows' is a tribute to pianist Alice Herz-Sommer, the oldest survivor of the Holocaust, who died last year at 110. 'I saw an amazing film about her called The Lady In Number Six,' says Julie. 'She was a massive influence on me. I wanted to write something that wasn't maudlin, but reflective.'

'Drop Hammer', written by Chris, celebrates the women of Sheffield who kept the steel industry running through two world wars. 'Julie's mother used to live in an industrial area of Sheffield,' says Chris. 'The drop hammer [a machine for stamping out molten metal] used to hit day and night. It was like the heartbeat of the area. So I thought about this hammer and it being a heartbeat, and about these women working in the factory. The men are all away at war, they're singing together and working together and keeping things going.'

'I have to be quiet and on my own,' Chris says of her writing process. 'Once I've got the tune in my head, I don't need to go back to it. I'll sit with the lyrics and do it that way.'

Julie says she's the opposite, playing the song repeatedly until she gets it right. 'I'm disciplined. I will go and do a day's work, and whether I come up with it or not, I'll do the day's work. When it gets tricky is when we're co-writing.'

Fortunately for this album, the co-writes came more easily. Julie had already written half a verse of 'Gone Girl Gone', and the pair finished it together in an hour and a half. 'That's Not Who We Are' – reflecting on the break-up of a relationship and yearning for a truce – took a little longer. Going in to the studio

Chris. 'We started writing songs together, and performing together outside of the Albion Band, but we were still a part of the Albion Band. We also started a relationship,' says Julie. 'We were a couple for 11 years. I rejoined the Albion Band, and it became a solid thing. We became inseparable, we travelled together, we wrote together and realised we had to make our own way without the Albions. We knew that there was a magic in the duo and that's what we wanted to pursue.'

And pursue it they did, with nine studio and two live albums, a strong following and with their songs covered by Mary Black, Barbara Dickinson, Christine Collister and Fairport Convention.

What do they like about each other's work? 'Julie's songwriting is fantastic,' says Chris. 'I'm a singer that's come from the folk world, who's learnt to write songs. Julie's been a songwriter all her life and I love the rock-country crossover that she has. I think of myself as the opposite of Chris – a songwriter

CHRIS PLAYS...

Chris While plays a 1996 custom-built Fylde Oberon with Indian rosewood back and sides, a cedar top and ebony fretboard. It's fitted with an LR Baggs Duet system. 'The Fylde fits me perfectly,' says Chris. 'It's smaller than a dreadnought so it tucks under my arm but still has a big voice. When Roger Bucknall built it for me I thought it was a great workhorse and didn't adore it, but I've grown to love it and it's precious to me now.'

Chris also plays a custom-built Powell SFG guitar, with cocobolo back and sides, a spruce top and ebony fretboard, fitted with an LR Baggs Anthem system. 'It sings like a dream,' says Chris. 'I can feel the vibrations when I'm playing it, perfectly balanced and big. I use this guitar for all my tunings and keep the Fylde in regular tuning.'

JULIE PLAYS...

Julie Matthews plays a Fylde Falstaff, fitted with an LR Baggs Duet system. 'She's like an old shoe,' says Julie. 'I bought her secondhand in 1993 and even with old strings on she sounded gorgeous. With her rosewood back and sides she has a great bass response, ideal for my rhythmic style of playing. I've tried other acoustics, but always come back to the Falstaff.'

Julie also plays a Powell gouzouki (a bouzouki with a guitar body). 'It's a big sound, again suited to my strumming style. Ken Powell is a brilliant luthier. He crafts his instruments with such care and attention to detail. She's mid-sized with English walnut back and sides and a spruce top.'

Julie's other instruments include a Kala tenor ukulele, Fylde mandolin, a Weltmeister 48-button piano accordion, and a Kurzweil PC2R module with a Studiologic mother 88-note keyboard.

adjacent to their house, they completed it in an afternoon.

'When Chris and I split up as life partners, we kept being musical partners, and there was a lot to get through in that,' says Julie. 'That was a big struggle, and some of that is in the songs on the album.'

'Definitely,' Chris agrees. 'Thinking back to the time where we were saying, "OK this has all happened, and it's all shit, but let's just remember what it was before." And that's not who we are now. It's fine; we can go back. We've worked through a lot of stuff with music.'

And what does the future hold for Chris While and Julie Matthews? 'Another 20 years!' says Julie. 'I feel like we're only getting started. We're getting to the point where I think we've cracked how to record songs, we're just getting there with writing, we know how to connect with an audience and perform, now I really want to do it!'

'Each year we look forward to the next year and see what we can do to keep it interesting for people who come and see us, and to draw in new people,' says Chris. 'The hardest thing in acoustic music is to get on the radio and to get out to more people. There are few hours where mainstream radio stations play our kind of music. So you have to do it yourself.'

They've got a busy few months ahead. Following a live session on BBC Radio 2's 'Weekend Wogan', the duo will be touring Australia in March and April of 2015.

'Chris and I are lucky,' says Julie. 'We're partners with our record company, so we've never had to compromise. We've always had artistic control. And I get to tour and travel the world with my best friend!'

Chris While and Julie Matthews' Who We Are *is out. For 2015 tour dates, check their website.*
www.whileandmatthews.co.uk

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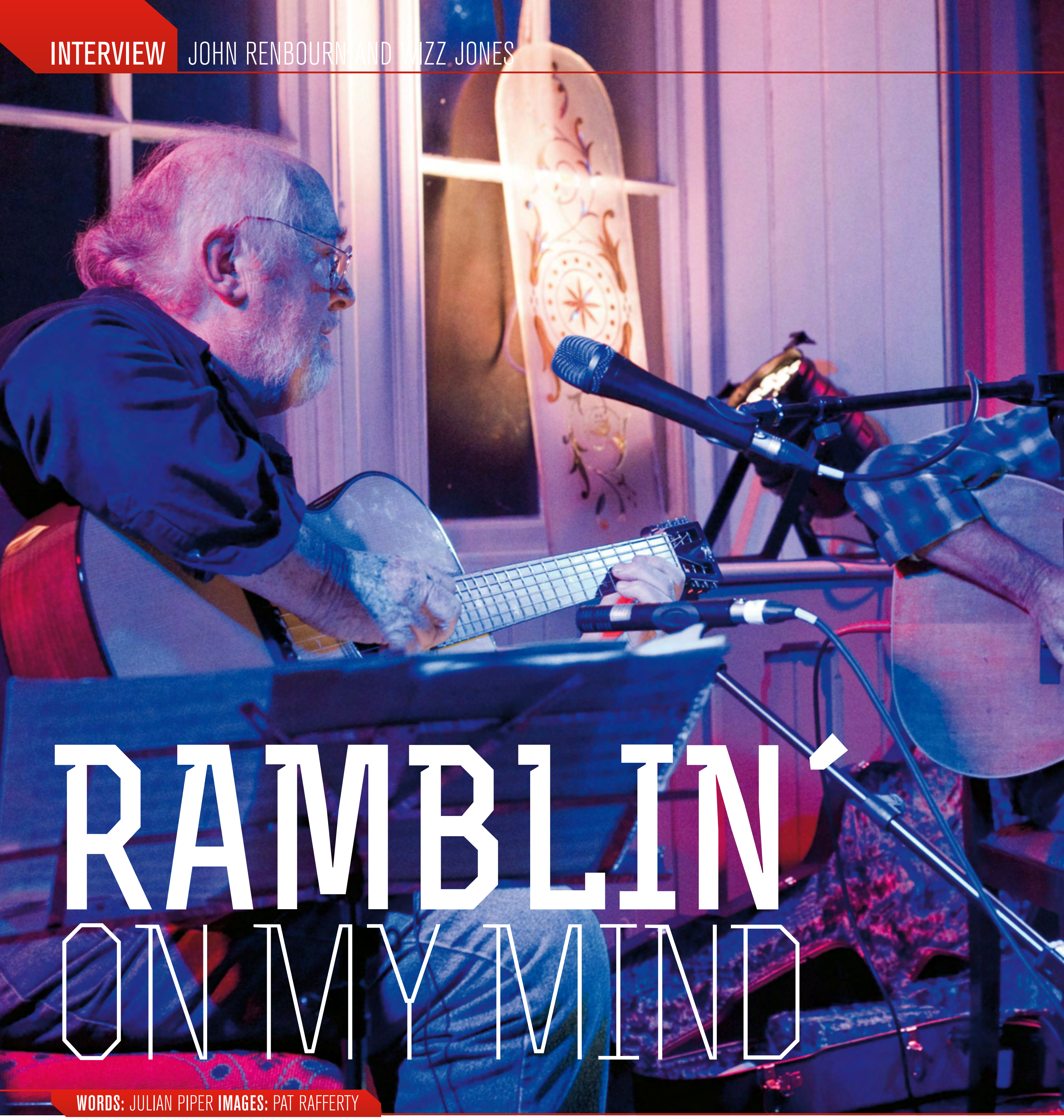


RAMBLIN´ ON MY MIND

WORDS: JULIAN PIPER IMAGES: PAT RAFFERTY

John Renbourn and Wizz Jones tell Acoustic about their early days on the hard road to Marrakech...

'There was one time I was in the States on a show with Doc Watson, and I made the mistake of including one of his songs in my set; I felt immediately embarrassed. After I'd finished, I made a point of finding old Doc and I apologised. Doc just leant back and said, "That's alright boy, I didn't hear anything I recognised..."'

As guitar legends go, you'd probably be hard put to find someone more self-effacing and down to earth as John Renbourn – airs and graces are not part of his vernacular. On the morning of our call, he admits to have been "stumbling around, with too many wine bottles to clear up." Not that such an admission is startling, it hardly reeks of rampant decadence, but it's possibly not what you expect to hear from a venerable guitar legend, especially at an age where he could well be expected to be bouncing grandchildren on his knee, and snatching an early night. But then, from his earliest days scuffling around London working as a kitchen porter, to playing at Carnegie Hall with Pentangle, you know that John Renbourn's enjoyed everything life's thrown at him.

A few years back, John announced he'd given up touring, so

at a time when he appears to be working harder than ever, we wondered what had brought about this change of heart.

'I just got grumpy,' he laughs. 'Just about everybody I was friendly with seemed to be popping off their perch, and I just got miserable; I didn't particularly want to die out on the road with my capo on. The real pleasure I get out of music isn't touring, it's composing, and I wanted to do more of that; the folk singing, guitar playing bit is just what I do when I go out with Wizz. I get home and start writing out all kinds of mad stuff.'

Holed up in the Scottish Borders, before settling down in this particular rural retreat, John had spent time in Oakland, California, a place he describes as "murder mile". Quite a life change, but his domestic adaptability mirrors his music. From early days moulding his guitar work on the songs of icons like Big Bill Broonzy and Josh White, musicians he saw playing when still barely out of short pants. 'I was obsessed with Josh White, my mother used to have to take me to see him when I was about 11 or 12, and I had this book *The Josh White Guitar Method* that came out in 1956.'

Classical guitar, jazz, and folk have effortlessly rubbed shoulders in his musical palette, but now he sounds like a man who's found nirvana. 'I'm down in the country where all the dropouts hang out, and it's remote and really beautiful.'

And he's equally happy about the fact that for the last few years he's been hanging out with one of his best old mates, the quixotic Wizz Jones.

'I met Wizz in the early 60s. He was being turned away from the Guildford British Legion club because his hair was down to his ass and he didn't have shoes on. He looked Neanderthal and they wouldn't let him in, even though he was booked to play,' John chuckled. 'Wizz was already a bit of a legend and was living down in Newquay, Cornwall.'

At Kingston Art College – an establishment he admits to visiting infrequently – he played in an RnB band with the intriguing name of Hog Snort Rupert's Famous Porkestra. Unable to afford an electric guitar, he made do by borrowing one.

'When I did get a guitar, it cost me a fiver, and if you'd ever seen me in those days, you would have realised that no one would have allowed me to get anything on hire purchase; I was a scuzzy looking bloke who often got turned away from restaurants.'

John's guitar that later featured on the cover of his first album was a Scarth – a British-made dance-band instrument with an arched top. He still has it, but admits the guitar had its little idiosyncrasies. 'The action went up and down according to the weather, but you could counteract that by wedging a lollypop stick under the neck, and I quite liked that as it added to its mystique. But good steel-string guitars were few and far between; it was a choice between buying a Harmony or a Levin.'

Following in the footsteps of Wizz Jones and Ralph McTell, all part of the heady, burgeoning Cornish folk scene, John headed west. 'I was scuffling, trying to keep my head above water and get some bread together. I ended up in Brixham, and didn't know where I was, but when I got there thought it was the kind of place where I might meet kindred spirits. I wound up standing on the quayside amongst the painters, and they pointed me to a pub called the Rising Sun, indicating that there were more types like me in there. Sure enough there were, and it was a revelation to meet other people in the world who were pretty similar; I'd meet guys who'd play like Big Bill Broonzy and Rambling Jack Elliott; we all shared the same idols.'

'I ran into this guy called Matt McLeod who played good old blues, and we buddied up. Matt's just found some recordings of us playing together in 1963, tapes with Davey Graham and Beverly Martin. A record company's going to put them out next year. We were all in awe of Davey Graham. The first time I saw him was when he was with John Mayall, at the Wooden Bridge in Guildford; he was playing his Gibson guitar with a roundhole Dearmond pickup, pulling out beautiful riffs to this RnB stuff. It was fantastic.'

The folk scene that John stumbled into was not, as he well remembers, particularly enamoured of the new breed of bearded young upstarts. 'There weren't many folk clubs back then, just the horribly traditional ones, and we were looked upon as just a bunch of beach bums, and they hated us! They considered us a scourge while they were all reviving these songs going back to Ye Olde Englande; people trying to play Lead Belly songs badly were just

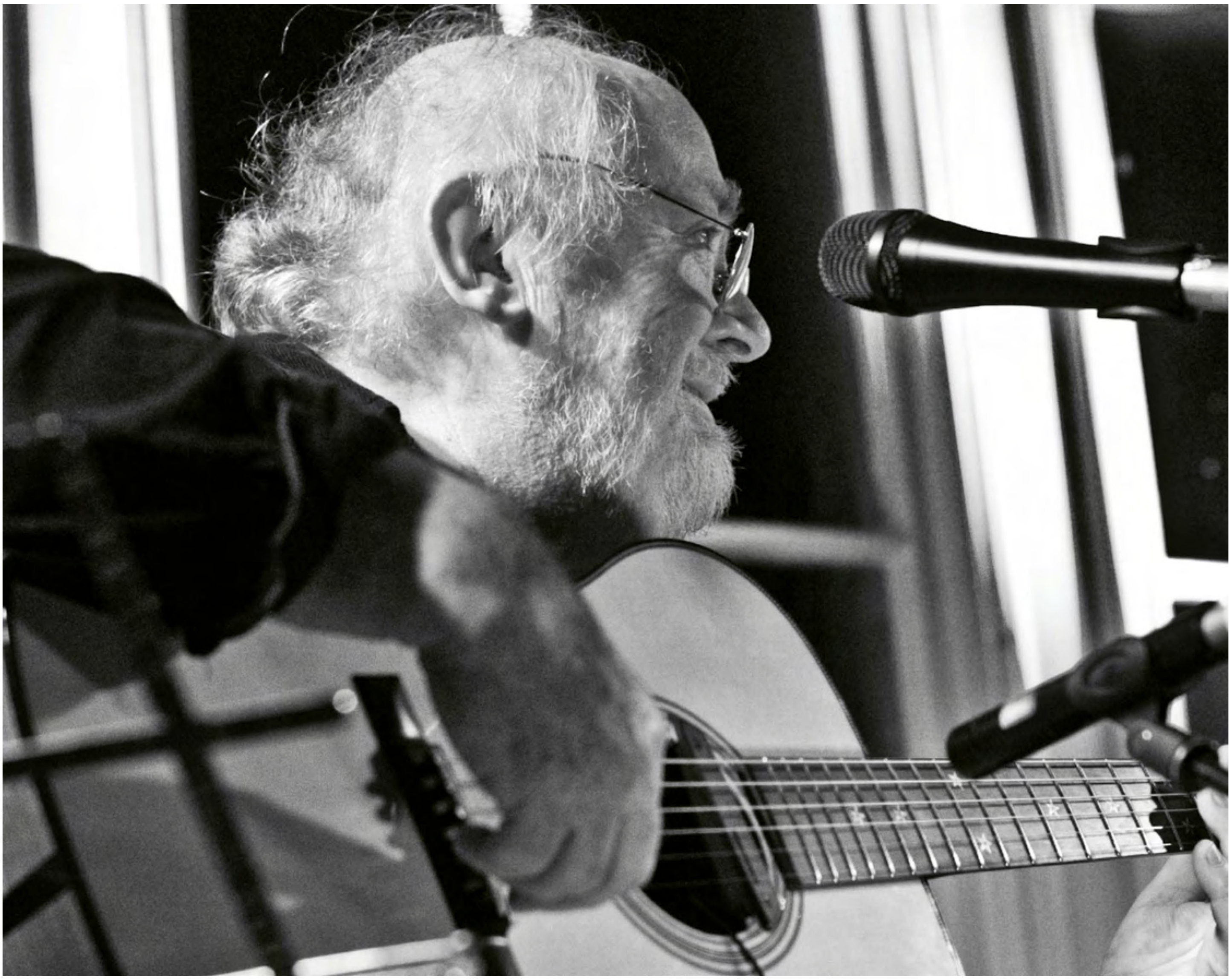
despised. When the first record came out I could just about survive playing clubs, and there were a few good places like the Bristol Troubadour that didn't have a traditional bias.'

John's first paying gig was supporting American one-man-band Jesse Fuller, a gig he describes as "a dream". 'The students were having a massive do and they'd booked Wirral town hall. When I got there I looked for him, and there wasn't a dressing room, just a big boardroom at the back of the stage where they had a long table and oil paintings, and massive comfy chairs. His massive Silvertone 12-string guitar was on the top of the table, and at that point I was thrilled just to be in the presence of this guitar. Then I heard a big snoring noise, and found Jesse asleep under the table. He was an old hobo, and preferred that to sitting on the couch.'

Along with Davey Graham, John Renbourn was one of the first people around to start using alternative guitar tunings. 'Davey Graham was a myth; he wasn't considered human, just some kind of wandering legend, but I was making up tunings from the off. I'd hear Blind Willie Johnson playing in open D tuning, but knew that Matteo Carcassi also used tuning on parlour guitar tunes, which is how it got into the American tradition. I'd had classical guitar lessons and had taken my grades at the Guildhall, so I was au fait with the tunings that were used in early classical guitar, and just made up a few myself. It wasn't common knowledge among the guys who were sitting around and trying to pick up things here and there, but the open G tuning dates back to the early 1800s, and if you could figure it out, you'd realise that they weren't using standard tuning. Plus, back then, a lot of us didn't know you could use a capo, so you ended up working things out in absurd keys!'

Half a century on, the laid back acoustic legend that is Wizz Jones ironically finds himself as the "doyen of the Cornish folk song society" as described by John, but it's unlikely to have made any impression. Despite being mentioned by Eric Clapton and Keith Richards as being a primal influence on their own playing during teenage years in Kingston, such accolades cut very little ice. Interviewed on a BBC Radio Four morning news show recently by Evan Davis, impressed that Bruce Springsteen had begun a Berlin concert with Wizz's song 'When I Leave Berlin', a note of incredulity crept into Davis's delivery when he encountered Wizz's lack of excitement at hearing about such a stellar event.

'I'm lazy about everything which is why I don't practise guitar, I'm just not a dedicated musician,' he admits. 'People like Bert Jansch got up in the morning and played all day, but I've never been like that. When you're young and starting out, you chase fame, but if it doesn't happen you have to get over all that, get into middle age and think, "Well, that's alright, I've hardly written any songs but it works." You get star struck at the beginning, and you really want to do it, but the people you admired had just as many problems as you. I used to sit at the feet of people like Rambling



Jack Elliot and long to play the way he did, but years later when I could and was hooked doing it for a living, I met people like Jack, got to know them and record with them, and realised that they were just the same as me.'

Like Davey Graham, Wizz picked up his licks in Soho coffee bars during the 1950s before heading off on the European busking trail, eventually ending up in Marrakech. 'I was a working class kid with no money and no way to travel, and the only way was to hitchhike and do some busking. There weren't credit cards, no package flights; if you wanted to get somewhere, you had to hitch there.'

The mists of time have inevitably dimmed memories, but Wizz recalls first meeting John in 1965 at the Addlestone Folk Club. 'This young guy got up and started playing all this stuff he'd learnt off the first Davey Graham album. I thought, "Bloody hell, he's good..." Over the years I got to know him, I did the support on the last Pentangle tour. It's great fun on the road with John; he doesn't need to go out and do these smaller gigs, he has enough stature, doesn't want to schlep around the country, but he does it with me because I know we have a good laugh. It's very creative and nice to be involved with him. We're supposed to be making a record together but with John living in Scotland and me in London, it's a bit difficult,' he laughs. 'Touring with John is great because he has this reputation, attracts big audiences, most of whom have never heard of me before,' Wizz admits. 'They say, "Hello man, Wizz who are you?" And you just have to accept that because I've never had that sort of profile. I started playing guitar because of the music, I never thought I'd make a living doing it, and it wasn't for lack of trying in the early years. I always laugh when people say, "Oh yeah, your friend Ralph [McTell], he's got a number one hit but you've kept your street credibility." I say, "Hang on a minute, it wasn't for a lack of trying..." I took loads of what I thought were commercial ideas to the record company I was with at the time, and they didn't want to know! I always knew you had to try and find some commercial success to justify sitting around playing guitar, even if it was just to put food on the table. I've been lucky that I've survived and got through it all, but I'm probably just copping out and making excuses; I am, by nature, a lazy person. People often ask me about guitars, and ask what other guitars I own. I tell them that I don't have any others apart from the Epiphone Texan I play. I bought it in 1966 and have played it ever since. Why would I want any more?'

John Renbourn and Wizz Jones tour throughout 2015. John is also holding workshops, details of which can be found on his website.
www.johnrenbourn.co.uk
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BRETT DENNEN

*The Californian singer-songwriter has just released his album **Smoke and Mirrors** in the UK, so Acoustic caught up with him to talk about Martin Guitars, the Californian mountains, and finding creativity in insecurity.*

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES **IMAGES:** ATLANTIC RECORDS

You may not be familiar with Brett Dennen just yet, but the cool Californian recently swept into the UK to launch his fifth studio album *Smoke and Mirrors* and support chart favourite Paloma Faith.

'Paloma asked me to do it,' Brett opens. 'She has been listening to my music for a few years now, and wanted me to support her on those gigs. It just goes to show, you never know who is listening to your songs when you put them out there!'

As a kid, Brett would attend summer camp in California's High Sierra; he hiked and climbed by day, then sang along to Neil Young and John Denver by the campfire at night. Over the past six years, though, thanks to Brett's initial do-it-yourself attitude and persistent coffee shop touring, the 35-year-old has gone from demonstrating how to start a fire with two sticks to touring with not just Paloma Faith, but US heavyweights such as John Mayer. So what about his sound? Acoustic guitar, gentle percussion, and lyrics with an upbeat optimism. Think Jason Mraz – just swap the surfboard for a backpack.

'Some of my songs were heard by a guy called Denzyl Feigelson from iTunes,' Brett says of his big break. 'He passed on my album to Chris Douridas who is a DJ on a radio station called KCRW in Los Angeles. KCRW is known as a "taste-maker" station; they play stuff way before anyone else, and they pick out stuff early on that goes on to be successful. One of the people who picks music for TV show themes listens to the station, and she put my music on two TV shows: *About A Boy*, which is a comedy series airing this year; and a show called *Parenthood*. Getting my music onto TV shows like those is great exposure for me. Social media is important, too. There are instances of British bands and musicians who are really big here in the UK, but not getting radio play in the US, but the station play-listers monitor social media, and if they see something popular on Facebook or whatever, they will pay attention, and maybe start giving those albums some attention because the buzz is out there. I should stress though, that although these strands are great in terms of getting my music known, there is still no substitute for good old-fashioned touring – I tour all of the time.'

'I will take any and every opportunity to win people over to what I do, I don't care what gets them into one of my shows, as long as they come along and listen; I will give them some music that hopefully they will enjoy and want to hear again.'

"I think experiences push you on to do your best – and I like that. I think most good art does come from a certain state of insecurity."

Brett's introduction to acoustic music came, not through the standard route of picking up a guitar around the house – or at least, it's not as direct as that.

'We did have a guitar, I think it may have belonged to my grandmother, and it sort of layed around the house, but no-one played it – no one knew how. I had the idea that I was a "guitarist" because the guitar was there, and I knew that eventually I was going to get around to playing it. What actually sparked my interest in the acoustic guitar was going to summer camp – something I did a lot growing up. The camp I went to wasn't like the ones you see on TV or in films, it was up in the High Sierra Mountains. We did a lot of climbing and backpacking. The part I always loved best was when we camped outside, and in the evenings, one of the counsellors would bring out an acoustic guitar and play songs. That's when I decided that I was going to be one of those – a camp counsellor who could play an acoustic guitar and sing songs – and that is what I did. I learned the standard songs from artists like John Denver, Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, and Neil Young – all of the artists who helped to shape my interest in songwriting and playing.'

'It's strange because I always knew I was going to be able to write songs, it was just something I hadn't gotten around to yet. I knew I could do it, and that turned out to be true. I think I just didn't really know who I was, or if I had anything to say and, as I grew up, I thought about myself and my place in the

world, and things I wanted to express – and out of that grew songwriting. Sometimes I get the whole thing – music and words – and sometimes I write a poem and put it to music, and sometimes I have a phrase and a few notes, and it stops there in my mind. I may write another song, or more, but that idea will pop up occasionally, maybe over a period of months or years, until it is ready, and the rest of it comes along as well. There is a power in phonetics and music, some words just sound wonderful with certain notes and chords, so I keep them together and work them out when the time comes.'

'Oh no,' laughs Brett, tousling his ginger hair and rearranging his glasses. 'There is no design here; I wear the same clothes on stage as off stage, and I am what I am. I have considered eye surgery, but only because of practical reasons. I backpack a lot, and it's wonderful to fall asleep seeing the stars, but you can't fall asleep with glasses on so, for that reason, it would be nice not to wear them. The other reason is sports – I ski and surf a lot, so it would be good to be able to see easily, but I have no problem with wearing glasses.'

Brett bought his first "proper" guitar, as he puts it, in his late teens – a C.F. Martin & Co. model. 'I did get a Martin, yeah, but I couldn't afford one of the really nice high end models. I bought a lower end one with a mahogany body instead of rosewood. It's a real workhorse. It has been broken in two pieces and glued back together, and I still play it now – I recorded my first album using it. I bought it in an acoustic guitar shop in south San Francisco, and I drove over two hours to get there, so there was no way I was going to leave without a guitar, and that guitar was going to be a Martin. People say to me all the time that they want a nice Martin, and I totally get that because that's how I felt, but I would say to anyone who can't afford to get the Martin they want, to have a look at some of the used Yamahas from the 1990s as they are amazing guitars. You can get one of those for maybe $250 and they sound amazing.'

> *"I didn't know if I had anything to say, but as I grew up, I thought about my place in the world, and things I wanted to express – and out of that grew songwriting..."*

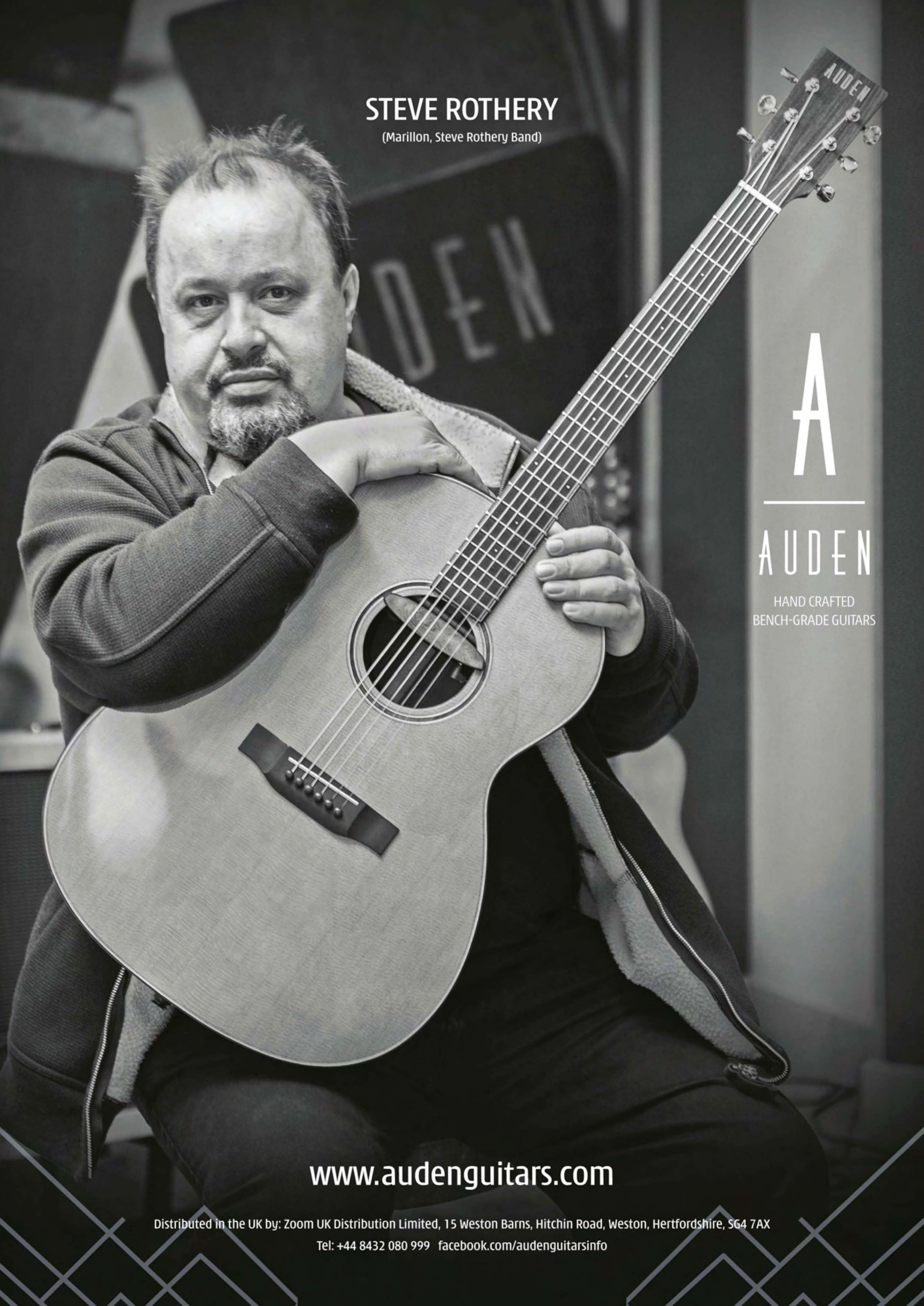
'I take two Martins out on the road with me now – a D-35 and a D-28. I went through a phase of really liking salsa music, and writing a bunch of songs with that salsa feel – and nylon strings are much more comfortable for that style and tempo. My style was to make a statement with a song, but now I like to get a lot of thoughts and ideas into a song, but using just a few words and phrases. I've come to realise that I like to strip things down a lot more. If I am writing a love song about someone leaving, it won't just be about that, there will be some moving into other subject areas about other things going on in the world. I think most musicians start with a set writing and playing style, and that evolves with time and experience. We all evolve constantly as human beings, and an artist has to be sure to allow that

evolution to flow naturally though their work, and not hang onto ways of working.'

One thing he's not evolved from is stage fright. 'It's worse when I am doing a support slot, or doing TV. On a support slot, you never know if the main artist's audience is going to like you, but I do like the challenge of winning people over. It happens just before I go on, and then I am working on getting them on my side and enjoying what I do. The other time is in TV studios – it's much easier winning over an audience you can see, rather than knowing that millions of them are out there, but all you can see is a giant black box with a red light on it. I think those experiences push you on to do your best, and I like that. I think most good art does come from a certain state of insecurity.'

'It is a fine line,' Brett says as he considers his response between craving artistic credibility or commercial success. 'I think I can achieve commercial success with the credibility that I am intent on building with my music. You can be someone who manages both huge success with fantastic work, but artists like that are lightning rods – they only come around occasionally. To me, success is being able to sustain the lifestyle that creates your music or your art. The measure of your success is funding the life that makes your art – that's what it is all about for me.'

Brett Dennen's Smoke and Mirrors *is out now on Atlantic Records. For Brett's tour schedule, visit his website.* ***www.brettdennen.net***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LADY ANTEBELLUM

The seven-time Grammy-winning Nashville trio fly into the UK with their latest album 747 ready to headline the O2 arena for the biggest country music bash this side of the Atlantic: Country 2 Country 2015.

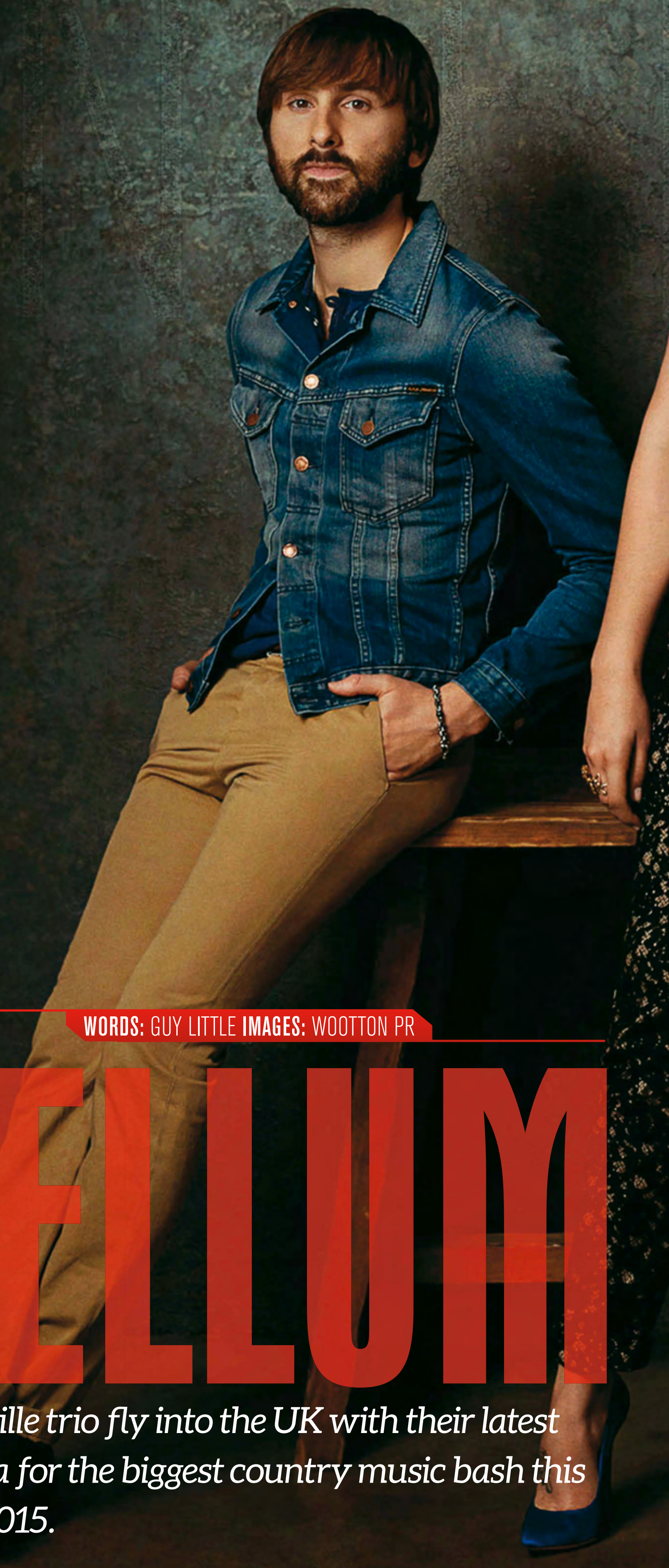
WORDS: GUY LITTLE **IMAGES:** WOOTTON PR

'We're all for evolving. Our career came about quickly, but we've worked hard to get where we are now,' admits Charles Kelley, one third of the vocal harmony-drenched country crooners Lady Antebellum, whose career took off at jet speed in 2008 scoring back-to-back multi-platinum albums.

In a haze of accolades and awards, Lady Antebellum's fifth studio album, *747*, arrived owing as much to groove-led dance floor tunes as to classic country music, securing crossover appeal along the way and sending them back toward the stratosphere after a turbulent period with their latter album sales. While signifying a move to mainstream appeal, *747* has its roots firmly planted in the interweaving harmonies we were introduced to on 2008 debut *Lady Antebellum*. At a moment when every other song on country radio is about throwing back a cold one and dancing with bikini-clad women, *747* is a refreshing antidote with an edgy rhythm and rich, layered textures. It's an album that ranks with one of the trio's best: 2010's *Need You Now*.

Nathan Chapman, a producer best known for his work with Taylor Swift, was at the helm of *747*. His fastidious attention to detail for sparkling country pop shines through on tracks like 'Bartender' and 'Long Stretch Of Love', while ballads like 'Lie With Me' and 'Down South' bring up the rear with a sense of longing, hankering back to their country roots with organic, stripped-back instrumentation.

A new energy, along with a cohesive celebratory theme, thrives on *747* and as the trio (Hillary Scott, vocals; Charles Kelley, vocals and guitar; and Dave Haywood, vocals and guitar) roll into the O2 arena to launch their new album in the UK – and to subsequently announce their headline slot at 2015's Country 2 Country festival – they're cruising at high altitude, clutching bags of take-out Starbucks



and being ushered into one of the venue's backstage VIP bars. Aside from being thrilled that they can watch Downton Abbey ahead of those in the US, spirits are high after BBC Radio 2 playlisted 747's lead single 'Lie With Me' (in the US 'Bartender' took the lead) – a sound choice, considering it's one that sits closest to the track that made them superstars: the much lauded 'Need You Now'.

'This is our fourth trip to London. We love our UK fans, they invest in the entire record, not just the singles. They even go back to the first album of ours that wasn't even out in the UK. The goal is to keep building the fan base, and with 747 we feel like it's our best record since *Need You Now* – and we're thrilled our label here decided to put out 'Lie With Me' as the lead single. It's our favourite track from the record,' Hillary starts. 'I fell in love with 'Lie With Me' as soon as I heard it. It has this crazy melody to it that I loved. There's something in that song that a lot of people can relate to. The demo was perfect and we knew listening to it that we were just going to go in there and replicate it.'

Each time Lady Antebellum return to the UK, the shows get bigger and bigger. In March 2015 you'll be headlining the Country 2 Country Festival at the O2 Arena.

Dave: It's one of the most notorious venues in the world. We've always heard about it, we've watched DVDs of artists playing at the O2, and I think it's the top of the tree for global touring. We're thrilled the festival wants to have us. There will be so many great artists there too, but for us to keep growing each time we come to the UK is a real treat for us.

It's no secret that country suffers a rougher rider in the UK than it does in the States, but people this side of the Atlantic are starting to really embrace it – the success of previous Country 2 Country festivals proves that.

Hillary: I think that's true, but for us we love being on the road. We have a newfound excitement about being on tour this year. We had such a drive to write a great record and to perform great shows. We had about six months off after I had my baby, and so we got to hit the refresh button and get excited again. We missed the whole process and missed being out playing shows, but sometimes it is good to miss it because you then come back full force.

Dave: Our road schedule involves a lot of writing. For us, being on the road is part of everyday life, but making writing a priority within that is important to us. I think that ethos influenced these songs and we really pushed ourselves to continue writing until we had enough great songs for the record. Country music is growing so much around the world. Everywhere we go, we find huge pockets of country fans. I know they've always loved the genre, but now more than ever, I feel like it's really making an impact.

How do the dynamics work between the three of you when you're writing?

Charles: We'll generally pull out an acoustic guitar and sit around with it working on certain ideas. For *747*, Dave started putting down a lot of demo tracks down at home. When you're writing with an acoustic guitar, you tend to write a little more ballad-heavy. With this record we did want that, but we wanted

it to be a bit more uptempo and so he would go home and go through a bunch of ideas himself and then bring them out on the road for us to check out.

There's a real sense of excitement on *747* –it's fast-paced and signifies a clear move from your usual country sound.
Hillary: That's why we titled it *747* because we wanted to give everyone that sense of urgency. We wanted the sound on this record to feel bigger.

Charles: On songs like 'One Great Mystery', we do stick to our roots, musically, despite the album changing direction a little.

Dave: The mandolins, the acoustics, the bouzoukis are all still on this record. That core group of instruments that are so prominent in country music had to be there. Country music focuses a lot on acoustic guitar and that makes it very organic and authentic that way. A lot of our songs build around the acoustic and we love to keep those core instruments in there. Nathan Chapman, our producer on this record, was great about trying some other things too and building songs a little bigger than we've done before like on 'Bartender' and 'Freestyle'. That was a good part of having someone like Nathan push us a little bit into stacking some extra bits here and there, but keeping the harmonies and acoustic instruments at the forefront of it.

Hillary: We listen to a lot of vocal harmony bands like the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, and the Doobie Brothers. We supported the Doobie Brothers early on in our career having grown up on their music. We just love harmonies. The first time we all realised we could sing together with stacked harmonies was when we wrote the track 'All We'd Ever Need' from our first record. When we put our voices together on that song and heard the three-part vocal blend, it felt really special. Some voices do not match, but for whatever reason, the three of ours worked out.

***747*, as well as being a more uptempo record, has the feeling of a live album with high-energy songs like 'Bartender'.**
Charles: Yeah, that comes from writing the majority of the songs from *747* on the road, and we did try to get that live feeling across on some of the tracks. 'Long Stretch Of Love' and '747' really open up the record and we use those songs to kick off our lives shows. They really set the tone.

Dave: Writing on the road does influence the way the record sounds. Not every song is crafted that way, but there are moments you have when you realise certain songs will live so well in a big arena – and we want to be a touring band for the next 20 years.

A lot of your greatest moments have been while performing acoustic sets – particularly the CMA Crossroads duet with Stevie Nicks –putting your stacked harmonies and delicate guitar parts at the forefront of the arrangements.
Hillary: Oh, we love taking our songs and performing them in that way. We've been talking about doing a completely acoustic tour in the future and taking it around the world. There will be a time when we, as an artistic outlet, just go back to the theatres for stripped-backed shows. Whenever it's just the voices and minimal production, you can hear yourself as a singer and guitar player much clearer. It makes for such an enjoyable experience for us – we'd love to be able to tell the stories behind the songs in that way, too. Some of our favourite performances are those stripped-back, three voices and a guitar set-up. After we played the CMA Crossroads with Stevie, she asked us to provide the harmonies for one of her new songs called 'Blue Water'.

Dave: A great song should work with just a voice and a guitar. That's the true testament to a great song – it shouldn't have all of these backing tracks and high-end production bits, just you should be able to sit down and play it exactly as it was written.

Speaking of collaborations, there's a great video on YouTube of Adele and Darius Rucker covering your hit 'Need You Now' at a US awards show. As the camera pans to the three of you in the audience, your facial expressions pretty much sum that night up for you…
Charles: We were huge fans of Adele around that time – it was right before *21* had been released. I don't really know how it all came about like that, but in a couple of interviews with her, she mentions that 'Need You Now' had been something she was listening to a lot while she was making her record.

Hillary: Adele came to one of our shows in Minneapolis and she didn't tell anybody. We didn't know she was there until after the show was over. We presented a Grammy to her on her big night, but I wish I knew she was there at our show to hang out with her. I guess she likes to fly under the radar, though.

Nathan Chapman's (Taylor Swift, the Band Perry) influence can be heard across *747*. What made you switch up producers and go with Nathan for this record?
Charles: We just wanted to mix it up. A new environment, new producer, new influences; he has such an infectious energy in the studio, but we were really impressed with him from when we were in the studio with him before ['Compass'] and realised his creativity was what we needed. He works fast, which meant the whole process wasn't a drag – we could get ideas in there straight away and work them out quickly. The difference between touring two or three years ago, and touring now, is that our set back then was based around two or three songs, but it's now full of singles we've released. You're still constantly looking for ways to make it better, but it's a real nice feeling.

Hillary: The speed at which he works was right in line with how we like to be. We're still always thinking about what's happening next, and he has that mentality, too.

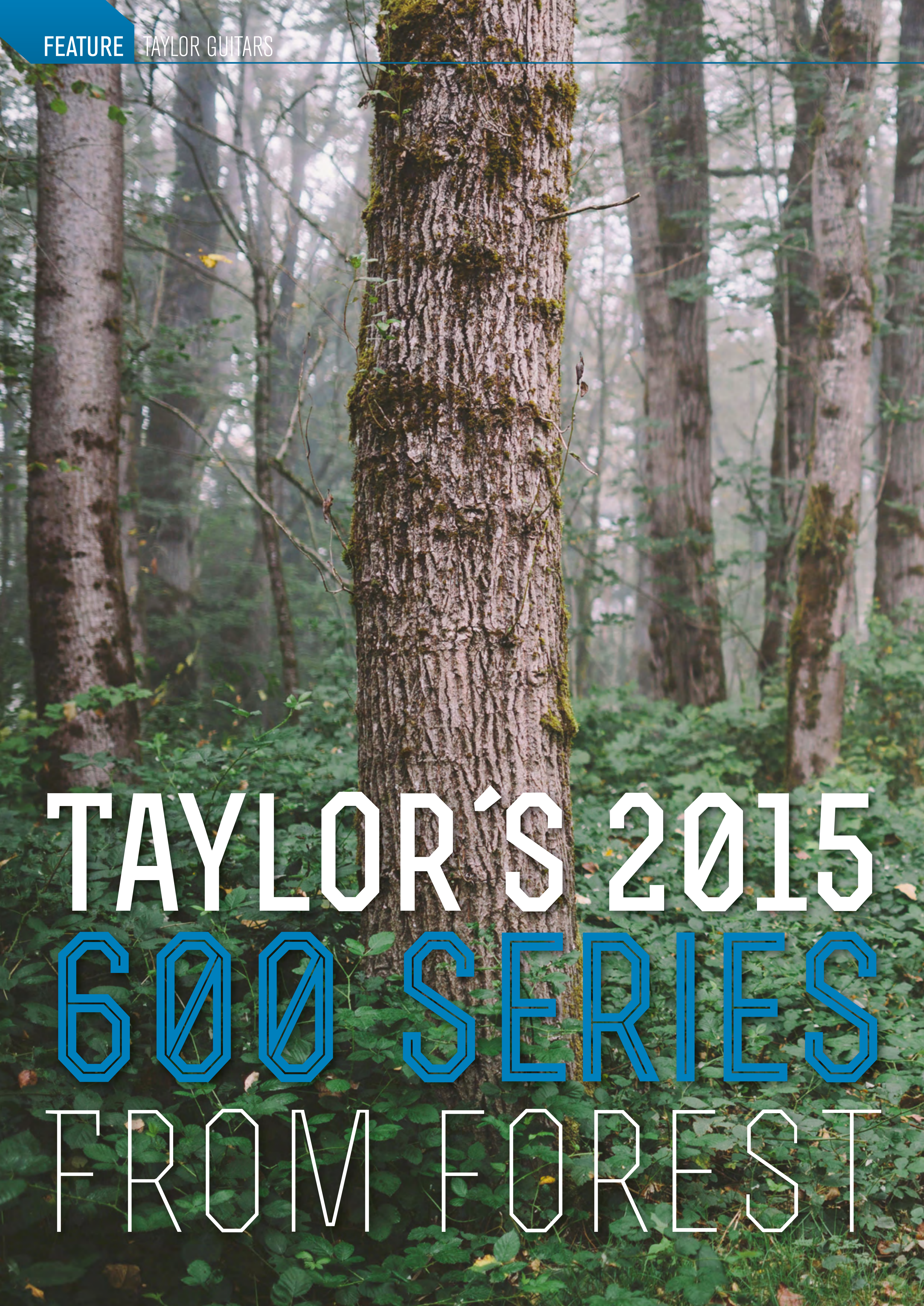
Between the songs you had written on the road, and the demos you received to work on, you ended up having over 1,000 songs to choose from when putting together *747*. How do you cut down songs from such a staggering amount?
Charles: Once we had the bulk of that narrowed down, we just knew which would make it. We had so many amazing demos from great songwriters – each of us received so much stuff from our friends in the business. We had about 15 songs that we all loved.

Talk us through some of the guitars you use to write and record with…
Dave: Both Charles and I use a lot of Gibson acoustics. I have an original 1931 L-00 that I use a lot – it was the main guitar I used to record 'Damn You Seventeen'. Our producer brings a huge entourage of instruments with him, too. He has a lot of stuff that's really old. I play bouzouki on a lot of our records, too – as well as when we play live. On 'Long Stretch Of Love' I used a handheld Appalachia dulcimer, made by a company called Woodrow. That was the key instrument that our co-writer Josh Kear used to write the track on. We all love those instruments that surround the acoustic guitar – a lot of the Celtic and Irish stuff. An old vintage Gibson from the 40s or 50s would be my ideal acoustic. Although there's a great Martin D-21 I have which was used on *747*. I love the electric guitar, but I'm obsessed with acoustic guitars. You get the character from the wood, and you can really hear that through the recording if you mic it up well. To me, there's something about the body of an old vintage instrument, especially a Gibson, that's just incredible.

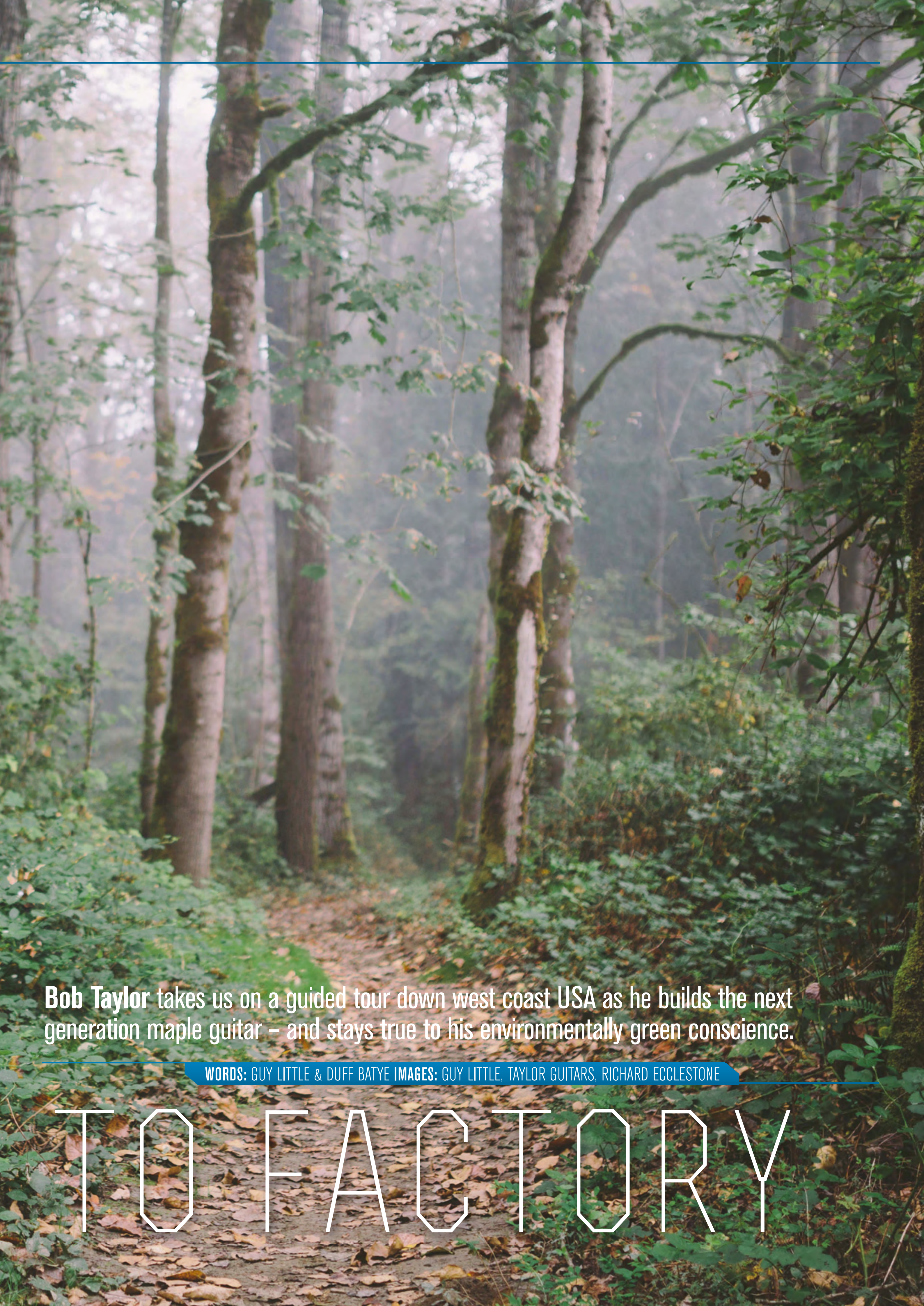
"The O2 is one of the most notorious venues in the world; it's the top of the tree for global touring. We're thrilled that the C2C festival wants us."

After seven Grammy Awards and countless US stadium tours and festival headline slots, how do the three of you define success?
Charles: That has changed for us as we've gone on through our career. If you asked us this question a couple of years ago, we'd all say that success meant winning a Grammy Award. Now, after seven, it's kind of like, "Oh my gosh, I never thought that would have happened." Now I think our live shows are what we're focusing on – growing a fan base and keeping it. We're playing arenas and stadiums and we love it, so if we can stay here for a long time, that's how we'd define success. It'd be nice to go and do theatre gigs for artistic reasons and to play stripped-back sets – not just because you have to do theatres. We've already made more money than I thought we ever would in my life, so that really doesn't drive us at all. It's about wanting to be proud of what we're doing and to still be relevant.

Lady Antebellum's 747 is out now. They headline the Country 2 Country festival at the O2 arena in March 2015 with Luke Bryan, Florida Georgia Line, and a host of other US country stars. Tickets are available now.
www.ladyantebellum.com



TAYLOR'S 2015 600 SERIES FROM FOREST



Bob Taylor takes us on a guided tour down west coast USA as he builds the next generation maple guitar – and stays true to his environmentally green conscience.

WORDS: GUY LITTLE & DUFF BATYE **IMAGES:** GUY LITTLE, TAYLOR GUITARS, RICHARD ECCLESTONE

TO FACTORY

Most guitar players will have undoubtedly purchased many guitars over the years. Whether it's your first handed down instrument, a cheaply bought starter, or finally owning that dream guitar, there are many factors that would guide your choice: tone, feel, look and weight being just a few. And the one thing that binds all those factors is the raw material – wood. But, sadly, natural hardwoods are an increasingly scarce resource, and it's not often that we sit back and think about the implications of our desire for beautiful guitars for the environment. But this is something that Bob Taylor, co-founder of Taylor Guitars, has thought about a lot, with a view to changing the manufacturing processes used within the entire guitar industry.

We are now numb to the statistics of global forest loss, but they are worth taking a minute to think about. An article in *The Guardian* newspaper in late 2013 stated that in the Amazon alone a forested area 50 times the size of a football pitch has been lost every minute since 2000. That equates to a total loss of 10 times the size of Great Britain – with only a third being replaced by natural or planted reforestation.

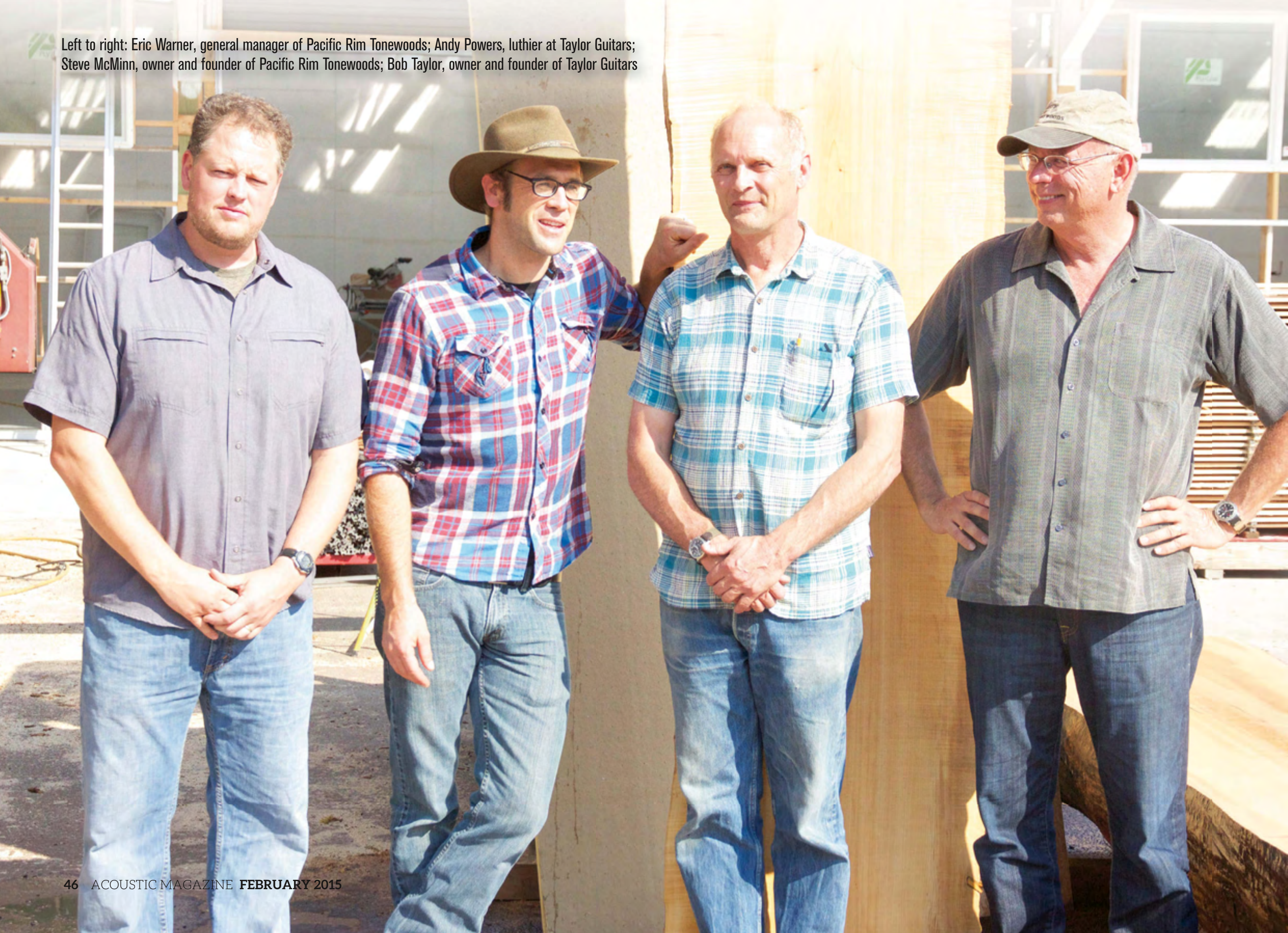
There are serious issues at stake with this dramatic loss of natural wood reserves. Obviously climate change – about three-quarters of Brazil's emissions alone come from rainforest clearing, as trees are burned or felled and rot, making the nation the world's sixth-biggest emitter of the carbon dioxide. Indeed, the World Resources Institute estimates that loss of forests contributes between 12 and 17 per cent of all annual global greenhouse gas emissions. It's estimated that if the current rate of deforestation continues, up to 28,000 species are expected to become extinct by the next quarter of the century, and it will take less than 100 years to destroy all the rainforests on the earth.

A multitude of legislation and enforcement has attempted to cut down on illegal logging. In 2008, the Lacey Act, which bans the trafficking of illegal wildlife in the US, was amended to include plants and plant products such as timber and paper. Europe has similar laws, as does Australia. Together, these pieces of landmark environmental legislation try to reduce global demand for illegally sourced wood products, but illegal logging still accounts for a portion of the destruction of the world's forests.

'We are living in a generation where almost all of the wood species we would use in a guitar are stressed beyond belief,' says Bob Taylor.

Although the musical instrument industry only accounts for a small portion of wood harvesting globally (compared to flooring and furniture makers, for example), there are high profile users of the exotic wood species that are currently at risk according to international agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The musical instrument industry, therefore, should take its responsibilities seriously. Knowing this, Bob Taylor is driven to find solutions for the future of tonewoods, and Taylor Guitars has come up with an innovative approach to "doing their bit".

This is where our journey starts: at Pacific Rim Tonewoods in the USA's Pacific Northwest, about two hours' drive north from Seattle, or an hour's drive south of the British Columbia border.



Left to right: Eric Warner, general manager of Pacific Rim Tonewoods; Andy Powers, luthier at Taylor Guitars; Steve McMinn, owner and founder of Pacific Rim Tonewoods; Bob Taylor, owner and founder of Taylor Guitars

SUSTAINABLY SOURCING MAPLE FOR RESPONSIBLE MANUFACTURING

PACIFIC RIM TONEWOODS, WASHINGTON, USA

Pacific Rim Tonewoods is a specialist sawmill that has been supplying wood to guitar makers for over 30 years. They focus on sourcing sustainable tonewoods and take their environmental responsibility seriously. Their vision is a future that encompasses reforestation, energy and material efficiencies, and the continued support of land conservation and clean water projects as part of providing guitar makers such as Bob Taylor with the best tonewoods as possible.

Veteran logger Steve McMinn owns PRT – nestled in the North Cascades valley – and the company's proximity to neighbouring Alaska and British Columbia means they have great access to forests rich with spruce – the standard for guitar soundboards. Bob Taylor has long been a customer of PRT and shares their ideology of reforestation and the sustainable logging of the tonewoods that he uses across his entire range of acoustic guitars. Of course, tonewood is much more than just "wood". It's lumber carefully chosen for specific aesthetic and technical properties, milled to precise specifications and expertly treated so that the instruments built from it will look great, sound great, and endure decades of playing.

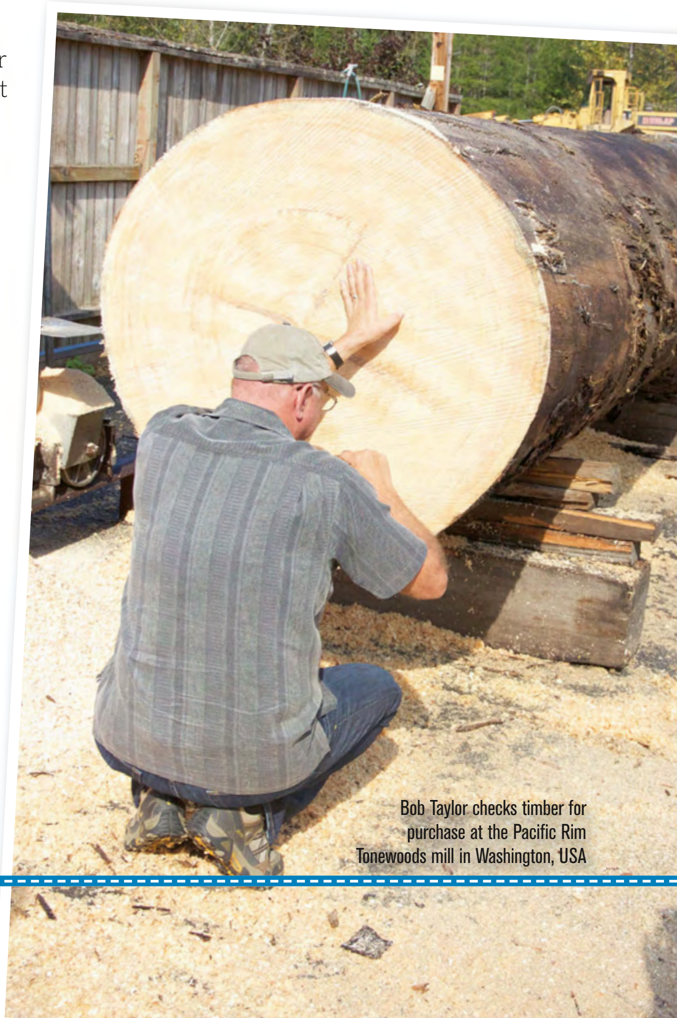
Bob Taylor has long recognised this, and realising that the world's rosewood, mahogany, and ebony supplies were dwindling, he looked at what can be used to build guitars with tonewoods readily available on his own doorstep in the United States. The answer? Maple.

'One good thing about maple is that you can source it locally in the USA. It also grows back very well and you can cultivate it without worrying about narcotrafficking or laws,' says Pacific Rim Tonewoods' founder, Steve McMinn, 'maple is just around.'

'We build guitars out of rosewood from India; we log in Honduras; we use spruce from the USA; koa from Hawaii; ebony, sapele and Ovangkol from Africa; and so, really, when you think of a guitar and the hardwoods that are on a guitar, most of them come from equatorial locations – tropical rainforests round the equator. These countries are stressed and you know that they are because we, as humans, have been taking their natural resources for hundreds of years,' says Taylor Guitars' founder Bob Taylor, battling with the noise in the Pacific Rim Tonewoods mill yard.

'We are reaching the end of that, so what can we do about it? What can I at Taylor Guitars do about? What can Steve at Pacific Rim Tonewoods do about it? What are we going to make guitars out of 50 years from now? 200 years from now? Well, maple is the great hope for a big percentage of the guitars that could get built. We can grow maple with some intelligence, and we can have superior starts and healthy trees. We can cut these maple trees at the right time, and we won't need to have logs that are baked in the sun in the future. I'll probably be gone by the time the first maple trees have grown that Steve has worked on and cultivated, but it's still worth it. What do we have to do at Taylor? We have to redesign a maple guitar and spend a generation getting people used to maple guitars. Violins, mandolins, archtops, cellos, are all made of maple and spruce. You get to the flat top guitar and people go for rosewood or mahogany. Those woods are running out. We see great hope in Hawaii for growing mahogany and koa, but in order to do this we have to get people transitioned over to another wood because we can't just keep making guitars like we do now. People make maple guitars by just taking off the rosewood back and sides, but we saw the flaw in that. Maple is a different wood, so it needs a different approach. I think there are two reasons why maple guitars aren't popular: one reason is because they're not brown, and the second reason is because people think the sound is too bright. I think you could build maple guitars that are brown and not fix the sound, and you'd still sell maple guitars. Maple is really hard to stain brown – it wants to be orange. Hey, people don't want orange guitars, either. We're making maple guitars that have been redesigned for maple wood, that are brown, and that sound as a guitar should. If we want to have guitars in the future, we have to start preparing right now,' says Bob.

Part of what makes Steve McMinn and his team at Pacific Rim Tonewoods unique in the wood business is their love and commitment for trees – again, an integral part of Bob Taylor's overall guitar building ethos. What is good for the environment is also good for people like Bob, but replenishing forests isn't something that can be done quickly. PRT keep a year's worth of inventory so that their clients are never without the



Bob Taylor checks timber for purchase at the Pacific Rim Tonewoods mill in Washington, USA

An example of figured maple cut from a log at Pacific Rim Tonewoods

tonewoods they need, but they are still a limited resource. Both the guitar maker and the tonewood supplier need to be efficient and creative in the way in which they approach logging and sourcing the best quality wood for guitars. Bob Taylor actively works towards creating and restoring forests across the globe – whether that be in Cameroon with his supply of sustainable ebony from the mill he has set up there, or across the US, with PRT, undertaking and sponsoring university research to investigate how to best propagate healthy and desirable lines of certain tree species. A desirable line of tree species, in this instance, would be a line displaying distorted growth – this may sound strange, but the growth is distorted in such a way that would lead to wood figuring which is an attractive aesthetic asset to a guitar's body. And when this sort of distorted development happens, PRT can clone the wood to grow maple trees displaying the same growth, giving players more quilted or figured maple guitars.

'When you see figured maple, what you're seeing is the tree growing in a deviated form from a straight, clean growth pattern,' explains Andy Powers, Taylor Guitars' luthier who heads up all new build projects. 'If you took a sample of straight hair from one person's head, and compared it to a curly strand of hair, that's the difference between figured maple and non-figured maple. The word we use to describe figured maple is "chatoyance" – that kind of light reflecting effect you get with figured woods. You're looking at something that isn't a uniformed colour, and that something has different cellular structures that reflect light in a different way. When I have a wood fibre that has grown crooked and all funny, when I cut a straight line through that I get a figured guitar back. Those fibers and cellular structures have been severed, and the light is reflecting off all of the passages almost like a diamond, reflecting light in all different directions. That's what is making the figuring – that's what is making the charm factor of the figured maple.'

Bob Taylor clearly has a plan in place for changing the way guitar makers source and use woods such as maple, but the bigger struggle is changing people's perceptions about maple as a tonewood for flat top guitars.

'It's foolish to think that we can just keep making more and more guitars out of wood that comes from tropical environments. If we want to change that then we have to use another kind of wood. What are the candidates? Koa is a possibility. Walnut is one, too, but maple is the better possibility. Maple has a rich history of making great musical instruments so we have to begin to change the way guitar players view maple. The end goal isn't going to be realised for another 20 to 30 years – but it's an end goal with more people playing maple guitars, without even thinking twice about it; they just buy a maple guitar. Not all guitars need to be maple, but more of them certainly do. For people to "get it", the guitars have to be brown, they have to not be so bright sounding, and we have to be making more of them so they are pushed into the market. It's all about the future of guitars. Interestingly, all I had to tell people was that ebony doesn't come pure black, and that we throw away brown ebony. Now, we're starting to use the brown ebony, and customers said, "Wow, nobody told us this before. We're happy to have that brown ebony." It's actually pretty stunning, and so we've seen a huge amount of customers asking for brown ebony on their guitars. They desire it because of the way it looks, but it's all about communicating it with people,' says Bob. 'At Taylor, with everything we design for the future, there must be sustainable components there and if there aren't, we feel like we have missed the market. Everything has to be more sustainable. For example, let's look at abalone shell – we have just put together a whole new initiative on this because in Baja California, Mexico (which is right in our backyard), there are some of the world's most sustainable fisheries. We buy all of our abalone shell from these sustainable fisheries now and we're working toward becoming a broker for abalone to all of the people that cut it, because it's in our own backyard. A lot of these things you have to take into your own hands. It's not that we're doing this to sell more guitars – Taylor will always sell more guitars anyway. We're doing this because we have to work with our partners in the industry to change the world.'

A maple tree in a neighbouring forest near Pacific Rim Tonewoods showing figured growth

TAYLOR´S INNOVATIVE WORLDWIDE MEASURES FOR ECO-RESPONSIBILITY

CRELICAM EBONY MILL, CAMEROON, AFRICA

'We're going to reach an end to a lot of the woods we see on guitars today. To understand how we're at this point, it's worth noting that current state of other woods. Mahogany was discovered in the late 1700s as a great wood. Up until that point, the British used oak to make all of their fine furniture and had cut it all down by 1875 or so. There was this mahogany wood over in Belize – British Honduras in those days – and people started bringing this wood in saying it could be a great substitute for oak. It turned out that mahogany became the king of woods. 200 plus years later of heavy use of this species that grows through all of Central and South America, we arrive at a point in our lifetime when it is mostly gone. We are also arriving at a point where the forests are completely stressed. Not only are we running out of mahogany, we've also been wrecking forests in the process, too. The only way to be sustainable is to go to these places and be the best operator that you can be,' Bob states from the Taylor HQ in San Diego, California. 'I believe that it's time for guitar players to understand the consequences of illegal logging in places like Honduras and Cameroon. The truth of it all is that it's hard to be sustainable and the only way you can do it is to jump into Honduras, or right into Africa, and run your own company there the way you want it.'

Ebony is a product well known to guitar consumers. The dark wood has been a staple of musical instrument production since Egyptian times and is prevalent across multiple instruments – notably the black keys on pianos. The dense wood is often used for guitar fingerboards due to its durability and ability to hold frets. But ebony is severely threatened across the world – the traditional model being that companies go into countries and strip the ebony until there is nothing left. The cutting of ebony is then made illegal and the natural source of the wood dries up. Madagascar was one of the best sources of hard ebony in the world, but it no longer allows any legal harvesting (despite this, Greenpeace estimates that almost 200 logs a day are still disappearing illegally in the country).

For Bob Taylor, this provided a disconnect – and he wanted change.

'We live in a time when all the wood we use is under tremendous pressure,' he states. 'This is the reason I'm driven to find solutions and leave as many improvements in place by the time my life on earth ends. We seek to make quality guitars that honour the wood and last indefinitely.'

When it comes to ebony sources there is effectively one economically viable and sustainable country remaining: Cameroon. Located on the western side of Central Africa, just north of the equator, Cameroon has been described as having all of Africa in one country for its cultural and geological diversity, which boasts beaches, deserts, mountains, rainforests and savannahs. Ebony harvesting occurs in the rainforest regions, which are located in the southern and eastern part of the country.

Cameroon is part of the Congo Basin, one of the most important wilderness areas left on the planet. At 500 million acres, it is larger than the state of Alaska and stands as the world's second-largest tropical forest. The Congo Basin spans across six countries – Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon – and is teeming with life. There are approximately 10,000 species of tropical plants in the Congo Basin and 30 per cent are unique to the region. Endangered wildlife, including forest elephants, chimpanzees, bonobos, and lowland and mountain gorillas inhabit the forests. Four-hundred other species of mammals, 1,000 species of birds and 700 species of fish can also be found here. So, this is a much bigger story than just guitar manufacturing.

But while Cameroon has a lot of ebony, Taylor was not looking to repeat the mistakes of the past. In November 2011, Taylor Guitars and Madinter, an

Sustainably harvesting ebony wood at the Crelicam facility in Cameroon, Africa

Bob Taylor selecting ebony for the necks of Taylor Guitars – using ebony that once would've been thrown away.

international distributor of musical instrument woods, assumed ownership of Crelicam, S.A.R.L., a major ebony mill in Cameroon. The Taylor-Madinter partnership was established as a separate holding company, known as TLM. Taylor began to develop a fresh framework for sustainable sourcing, one that blends socially responsible forestry with job training that will help Cameroonian communities support themselves and improve their living standards. Crelicam is now responsible for a large proportion of all the legally harvested ebony to come from Cameroon.

This alliance only harvests ebony in a way that is compliant with both local statutes and international regulations, but also aimed to do so for the benefit of the local community who, after all, should enjoy the value of their country's natural resources. For Crelicam employees in Cameroon, TLM made significant improvements in both their working conditions and pay.

Robert P. Jackson, the former US ambassador to Cameroon stated: 'We applaud Taylor Guitars' efforts to improve employee working conditions at the factories, and its determination to institute less wasteful and more ecologically sustainable use of ebony. We believe by fostering Cameroon-US business initiatives, we not only improve income for American companies, but the livelihoods of many Cameroonians as well.'

'What started as a "good investment" turned more into a social forestry, save the world, ecological company,' continues Bob Taylor. In 2011, he discovered that ebony contractors were actually discarding lots of ebony that wasn't seen as A-grade. B-grade would then be any ebony that was not pure black, but had streaks or colour within it. Unfortunately, the only way to discover if the ebony was pristine was to cut down the trees. So, there was a huge amount of wastage. Taylor estimates nine out of 10 trees were discarded for the one usable tree.

Taylor decided that the solution to this issue was to follow a philosophy to "use what the forest gives us," and to allow variegated (coloured) ebony wood to be used, therefore reducing the wastage of healthy trees. And he agreed to pay the contractors a comparable amount for variegated ebony as was being paid for pure black. But for this to happen we (the guitar players) need to follow Taylor's lead and accept that dappled wood on fretboards is part of the solution to this global problem – and that having non-pure black ebony affects nothing on the guitar. Blindfolded, would you even notice? No.

'We'll do everything we can as a guitar factory to make every guitar beautiful. But the nature of what we thought was beautiful for a hundred years is simply going to change,' Bob summarises. 'While the current conditions don't mean that the days of all-black ebony are entirely gone, they do mean that if we want to ensure a sustainable ebony supply for future generations of instruments and players, we must embrace greater cosmetic diversity. Let's embrace what the forest can offer us right now. Let's be good stewards. Let's practise good forest husbandry. Let's help the people of Cameroon – and let's live within the confines of Mother Nature.'

It's a beautiful, modern vision for the guitar industry that can hopefully inspire other manufacturers, and indeed industries to follow suit. In the early stages of TLM's operation, Bob Taylor visited many American guitar companies who rely on ebony. Madinter's managing director, Vidal de Teresa Paredes, did the same with his company's major ebony clients. Both gave detailed presentations to raise awareness of the harvesting inefficiencies of the ebony trade and to explain the new vision they hoped to implement.

But three years on from investing in a new sustainability model through Crelicam, does Bob Taylor believe the message is really getting through?

'It's a great question,' he says. 'In the Taylor Guitars world, we have changed things a lot. Our customers desire and ask for the wood with colour variation, and we use a huge quantity of it since we use ebony on all our guitars. Other manufacturers are slower to jump in, citing that their customers don't want it, which I don't totally buy in to because we sell to the same customers. In this regard, there is still a lot of work to be done, but I'm not discouraged in the least.'

In fact, Bob Taylor says that they feature the heavily variegated ebony on their 800 Series models – some of the best-selling guitars in the industry. Anecdotally, they've

heard from dealers who've had customers come into their stores looking for 800s and other guitars with the most variegated ebony as possible. So what of the public and industry's response to his initiative?

'Public response is, "Atta boy, Bob. Send us your coloured ebony," he continues. 'Industry response is the same. Other manufacturer response is, "Atta boy, Bob. We believe in what you're doing, just be sure you send us black ebony," and this is mostly in the bowed instrument world more than the guitar world. Many know that we won the ACE Award from the US State Department for our work in a foreign country, presented by John Kerry to me. What blew my mind is this: a woman on the selection committee wanted me to know that it was the initiative to put the colour variegated ebony onto guitars and into the market that was the key to us winning the award. Think about that. The US State Department not only knew, which blows my mind, but they cared and felt it was valuable. I never would have imagined.'

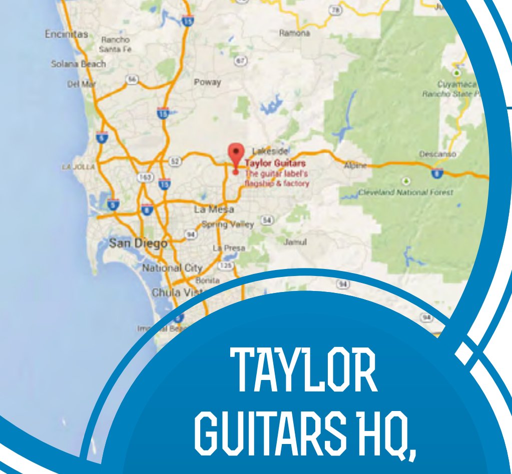
Bob Taylor is referring to the US State Department honouring Taylor Guitars in January 2014 with the Award for Corporate Excellence (one of only three given each year). The award cited Taylor's commitment to responsible practices in obtaining ebony for its instruments. Secretary of State, John Kerry, himself a guitar player, said, 'When Bob Taylor started Taylor Guitars he made a commitment to produce the best instruments from the best materials, and quality ebony is near the top of that list. But over the years, ebony has become harder and harder to obtain, and it's increasingly threatened with extinction because of the illegal harvesting practices that have become common throughout Central African forests. So, instead of joining the race to the bottom, in order to procure as much ebony as was possible, as cheaply as possible, Bob decided to change the race altogether – he bought an ebony mill in Cameroon, the only country in the world where it's still legal to harvest ebony. Through that mill, Bob and Taylor Guitars have changed the entire ebony trade.'

Ebony fingerboards at the Crelicam facility in Cameroon, Africa

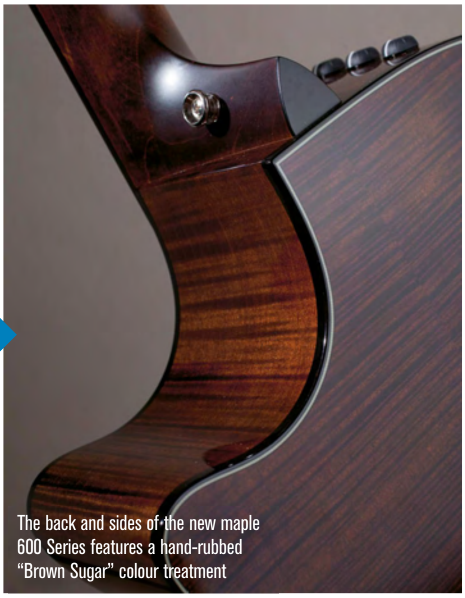
'It's all of this that leads us to the bigger picture', says Bob. 'It's more than not liking a maple guitar because it's too bright. We'll take the brightness away; Andy [Powers] knows how to do that, and then we'll get the colour right. There isn't a lot of maple out there yet, but we can change that. We can repopulate the forests with maple. We now get our mahogany from Fiji that people planted 80 years ago. For example, in Guatemala you could go down there and lease land to plant mahogany in a real natural habitat. You could ask the people there how it is and they'd say, "Oh, I've got mahogany planted down there and the government leaves me alone; it's a stable government." Yeah, they won't bother you while you're growing the mahogany, why would they do that? It's when you want to sell the mahogany that they'll bother you. For the 70 years while the wood was growing, there would be nothing to fight over because there's no money there, but once that wood is ready to sell, it would become – behind tourism – the biggest gross domestic product of the country. We could have a wonderful time planting in a Latin American country, but when it comes to harvesting our wood, things could have dramatically changed,' Bob says.

As lovers of acoustic guitars, we need to take responsibility for our choices. Not just for us, but for the generations of guitar obsessives yet to come. As such, Bob Taylor's commitment to sourcing sustainable wood should be applauded and supported.

A custom Grand Auditorium Taylor Guitar using sustainably sourced ebony from Cameroon for its back and sides



TAYLOR GUITARS HQ, EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA, USA


The back and sides of the new maple 600 Series features a hand-rubbed "Brown Sugar" colour treatment

Protein glues are used to optimise the tonal transfer between the guitar's "powertrain" components – the bridge and the bracing

The tops are torrefied – this means that they have been "roasted" to produce an aged tonal character and a slightly darker complexion

THE NEXT GENERATION GUITAR: THE 2015 MAPLE 600 SERIES

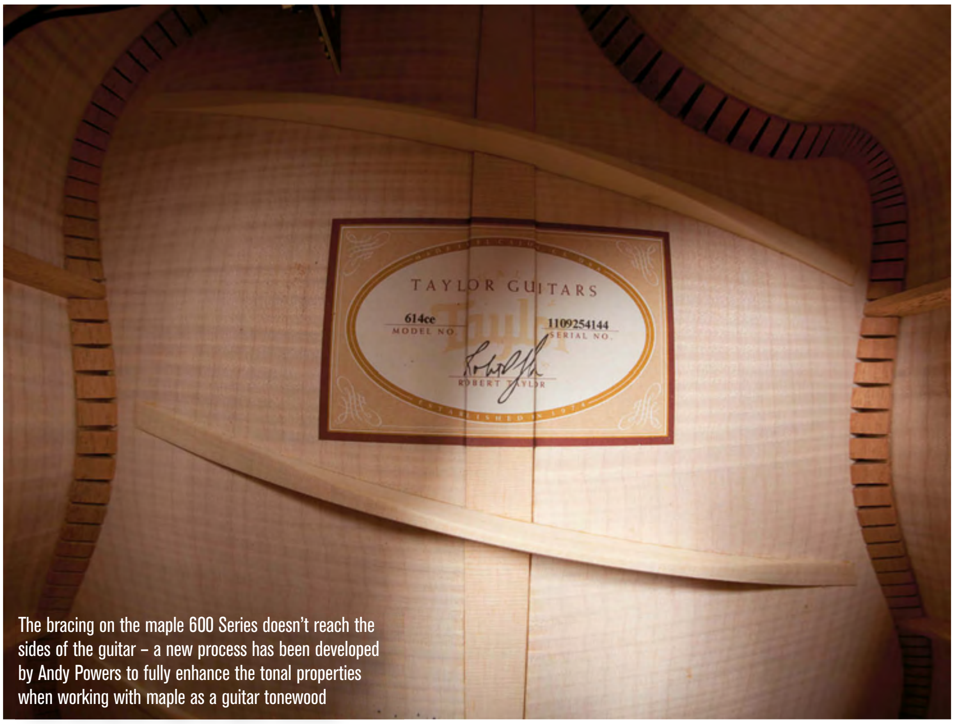
All of this has been for a reason – the guitar of tomorrow, one with Cameroon ebony, US spruce tops, and US maple back and sides. A sustainable guitar: the 2015 600 Series.

The 600 Series has been a vital part of Taylor's instrument offering for many years now. Despite its heritage and longevity, the 2015 600 Series offers a new approach to building a maple flat top guitar. For years, musicians have viewed maple guitars as merely a good stage instrument, or an overly bright sounding guitar used to cut through a loud mix. This new approach with the maple 600 Series reflects Andy Powers' desire to build an instrument from this tonewood that is first and foremost, a fine musical voice. He sought to create an instrument that offers a warm, complex, and expressive voice able to reflect the musicality of the player. There are some architectural elements inspired by the rosewood and spruce 800 Series guitars, but much of the maple 600 Series guitars reflect a fresh approach on how to build a flat top guitar using a material which has been a mainstay in the bowed instrument community for the past five centuries.

'People ask me what my mandate was for the new 600 Series,' Andy Powers says, 'and the truth is, it was simple: use more maple.'

'I'm a huge fan of maple as a tonewood, and I have been since I first started building guitars. One of the first guitars I built was from maple. Some of the most significant guitars in our playing and making history were maple instruments – look at archtop guitars. The thing with maple is that, historically, we did the same things to maple as we did to rosewood or mahogany guitars – and that's not fair. Maple has its own personality and needs to be treated in such a way. I've never understood why people would treat maple in the same way as rosewood. You don't cook a steak in the same way as you cook salmon, right? We work with their personalities and do different things to them. In this case, I've treated it a bit more like I would if I was building an archtop guitar or a violin. One of the most notable things with the new maple 600 Series guitars is that the back braces don't extend to the edge of the guitar. That's a critical thing because, that way, the back of the maple guitar can move more like a violin, or more like an archtop guitar.

You're not going to hear the same bright maple qualities that a lot of us associate with maple flat top guitars. Typically you'd see a maple jumbo – but



The bracing on the maple 600 Series doesn't reach the sides of the guitar – a new process has been developed by Andy Powers to fully enhance the tonal properties when working with maple as a guitar tonewood

The finished product: Taylor's 2015 600 Series guitar using maple from Pacific Rim Tonewoods, ebony from Cameroon, and Sitka spruce from the USA – all sustainably sourced to preserve the future of tonewoods. Pictured: 614ce, £2,922

that's the only one that's really stuck in our tradition. In our case, that's not what we are going for with the maple 600s – we don't want the big boomy sound of a jumbo, we want a richer, warmer sound with a more complex voice acoustically and on stage.'

The 2015 NAMM Show will see the launch of the new Taylor range – the redesigned maple 600 series. And as Taylor feature ebony in all of their guitars, the range will feature Crelicam-sourced ebony as well as the PRT harvested maple. Just take a look at the colour of the maple back and sides, with its stunning figuring – and the pickguard, in particular, shows how handsome non-pure black ivory can look on a high end guitar.

The redesign refers to tone enhancing design tweaks that Taylor has implemented; the ideas being that the traditionally bright tones of the 600s are underpinned with a warmer, softer note. And it certainly appears to be mission accomplished. The changes are subtle, but the richer tones give the guitar a more complete feel.

As the name would suggest, the body is maple, although it has a Sitka spruce top that undergoes a process called torrefaction – a roasting process that produces an aged tonal character marked by greater acoustic resonance and responsiveness. Torrefaction also gives the top wood a slightly darker appearance, much like that of cedar, complete with the customised bracing developed by Andy Powers, as well as different wood thicknesses for each model in the series. Then we've got the 3.5mm gloss finish, boosting the maple's volume. The obvious aesthetic refinement here is the colour of the maple back and sides. This is a hand-rubbed brown sugar colour treatment that gives the maple a darker colour and a rich figure with vintage appeal. This special colour treatment on the back and sides adds no thickness to the top's finish.

The guitars are finished with the traditional Taylor headstock and nickel tuners, and also feature Elixir Phosphor Bronze strings, while custom gauge Elixir HD Lights will be on the Grand Concert and Grand Auditorium models. The four models – the 614ce (£2,922), 616ce (£2,922), 656ce (£3,023), and 618ce (£2,721) – all feature the Taylor Expression System 2 pickup.

'From here on out, our goal is to build the greatest guitar we can. In a nutshell, that's what we have done. We have made a better sounding guitar for the future,' concludes Bob Taylor.
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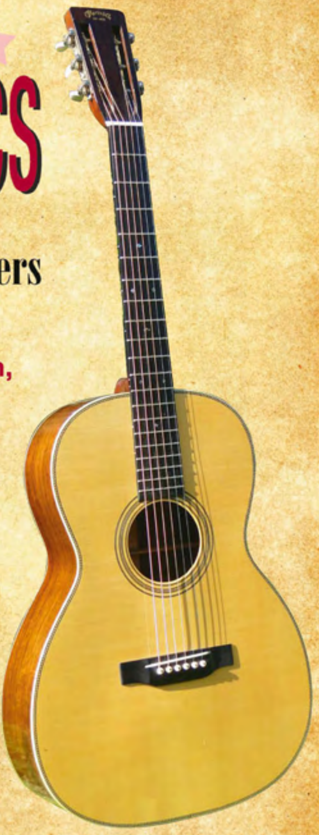

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TAYLOR 614CE MAPLE

Taylor relaunch the 600 Series with a flourish and upgrades aplenty – **David Mead** takes on the role of test pilot…

Around the middle of last year, I reviewed the upgraded version of the Taylor 814ce and found it to be a sweeter and more earthy version of the company's flagship model. Now it's the turn of the 600 Series to undergo the same sort of review and, once again, plenty has changed. Taylor refer to the new models as having undergone "tone-enhancing design strokes" and promise a richer, warmer response as well as a more complex tone as a result of that.

BUILD QUALITY

If I told you that part of the process of bringing about a new voice to the established 600 Series design involves roasting the top wood, you might be inclined to raise an eyebrow or two. But it's true, and a technique that has migrated from a few of the current top end electric guitar manufacturers who refer to it as "caramelisation". Taylor call it "torrefaction" – essentially the same thing – and it means that the wood has been heated up in a special oven to remove moisture and, as far as tone is concerned, enhance both resonance and responsiveness. It also means that the top looks darker with more of the hue of cedar than of spruce. It's an interesting idea; after all, we know that a guitar will open up as the wood ages and so if the torrefaction encourages this to happen much sooner, it must be a good thing.

In any case, the Sitka spruce on the top of our review model certainly has a darker appearance than brand spanking new wood usually does and I can see what Taylor mean when they say that the end result is more reminiscent of cedar, too. As to what it's done to the sound – well, that remains to be seen; for now we'll explore the other upgrades to the 614ce.

APP EXTRA
PRESS PLAY TO
HEAR THIS IN ACTION

I didn't suspect that maple was in play here when I first gave the guitar a quick visual once over. The rosewood-coloured finish – which Taylor call "Brown Sugar" – could fool the unwary.

It's always a bold move to redesign an established range, but if it's done as well as it has been here with the new Taylor 600 Series, then the results really do speak for themselves.

There's a new-to-the-model rosette, comprising abalone with an ebony and ivoroid surround and a pick guard made from striped ebony, as opposed to the more familiar tortoise-shell substitute. There have been changes to the bracing underneath the soundboard in order to revoice the instrument and the thickness of the wood and finish have both been reviewed, too. I'm told that the new 3.5mil gloss boosts the guitar's responsiveness while still preserving the original lustre you'd expect from a premium instrument. Then there's the use of protein glues and several other refinements along the way, as well. As with the 800 Series, you can see that this isn't just a casual wash and brush-up, it's a serious attempt to improve and remodel a range.

Back and sides here are maple and is very quick to point out that whereas you might have thought that this particular wood characterises a very bright response in an acoustic guitar, the changes here have resulted in a far warmer response. I have to say that I didn't suspect that maple was in play here when I first gave the guitar a quick visual once over. The rosewood-coloured finish – which Taylor call "Brown Sugar" – could fool the unwary until you look closely at the grain and discover the tell-tale flamed patterning. I quite like the effect, but if it's not your particular cup of tea then unadorned flamed maple is a custom option with this model.

The 614ce delivers on Taylor's promise of added richness and complexity, but the story doesn't end there because the guitar is fitted with the Expression System 2 pickup system which itself has been rethought and re-engineered.

The 614's neck is rock maple with a "brown sugar" stain on it, a matt finish and an ebony overlay to both the back and front of the headstock, the former bearing a mother-of-pearl patterned inlay, the latter the Taylor logo.

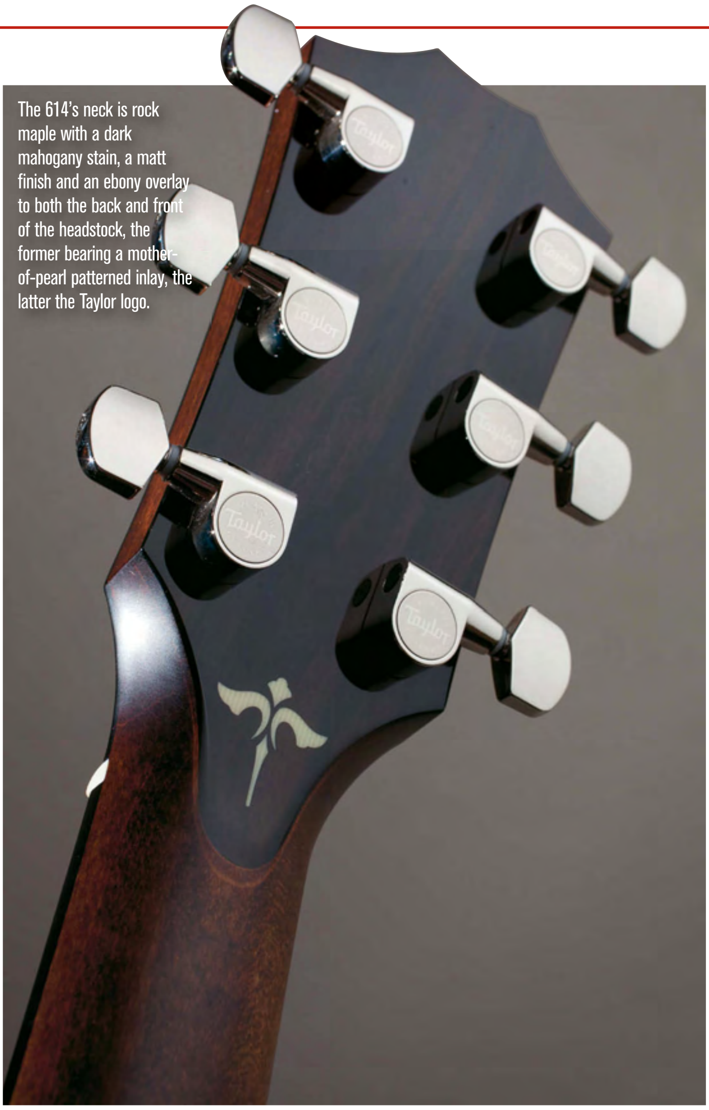
There's a 45mm Tusq nut at the top of an ebony fingerboard with newly designed ivoroid inlays along the way. At the end of the line, as far as the strings are concerned, there's an ebony bridge with a compensated Micarta saddle.

As with the 814, the guitar comes ready strung with Taylor's own recommendation for string make and gauge. Elixir's phosphor bronze HD Lights feature a .013 on the top down to a .053 on the bass, with a newly engineered .025 for the G. It's basically a "heavy top, light bottom" situation, but Taylor insist that it produces a better top and bottom end on their GA models.

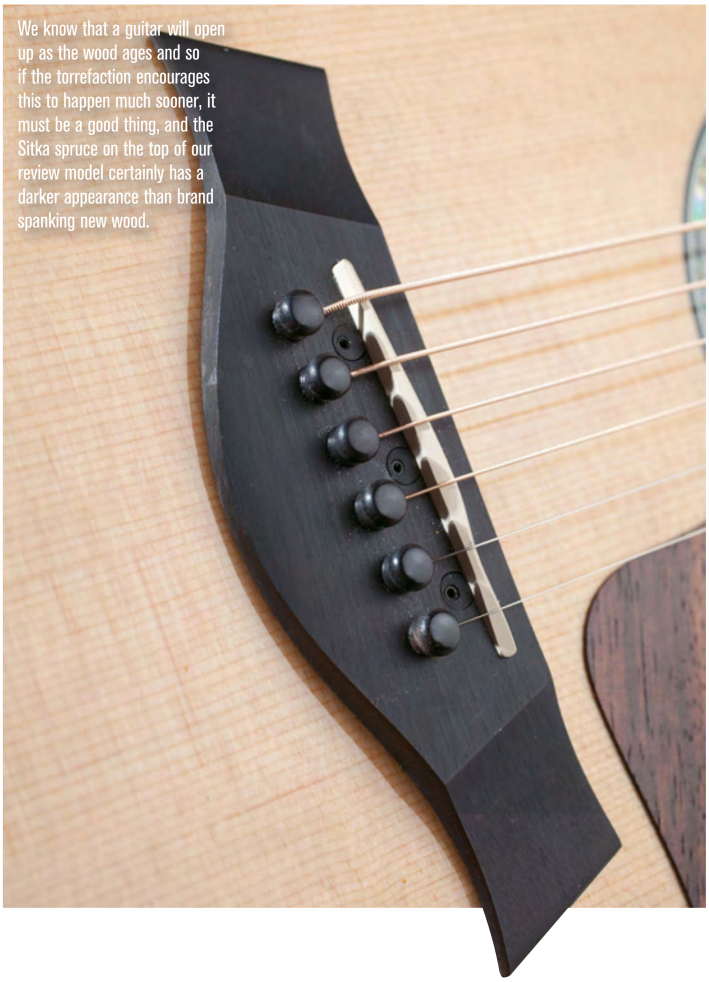
SOUND QUALITY

If someone told me that I would be playing a guitar with a Sitka top and maple back and sides, I think I'd be preparing myself for a fairly bright overall timbral effect. However, with the 614ce I've had these preconceptions completely turned around because the word here is "mellow" – and that's "mellow" as in "mature". It certainly doesn't respond like a freshly minted guitar in that there's a sweetness present that you might expect from a cedar topped instrument, without losing any of the punch of spruce. It's responsive, too; strummed with a pick there's an authority to each chord and bags of volume. Swap to fingerstyle and you can be as gentle as you like and not lose any of the warmth and sweetness. There's a good amount of sustain as well; I could easily count up to 12 before the notes of an experimental chord fully decayed. So acoustically, at least, the 614ce delivers on Taylor's promise of added richness and complexity, but the story doesn't end there because the guitar is fitted with the Expression 2 pick-up system which itself has been rethought and re-engineered.

Basically the main difference between the Expression System 2 and most of the other systems out there is that here the piezo pickup has been placed next to the saddle rather than underneath it. Taylor say that this results in a more natural and open response because the sensor is under less downward pressure and more sensitive to sideways movement. In practice, you lose nothing of the guitar's acoustic authority and open response once you plug it into an amp. When I reviewed the 814ce I used the words "breathy and transparent" to describe its amplified voice and I think the same can be said here. I did have to fiddle with the Taylor's onboard EQ a little to sort out a bit of a hump in the bass at first, but realistically it was just about a case of plug in and play, which is how it should be.



The 614's neck is rock maple with a dark mahogany stain, a matt finish and an ebony overlay to both the back and front of the headstock, the former bearing a mother-of-pearl patterned inlay, the latter the Taylor logo.



We know that a guitar will open up as the wood ages and so if the torrefaction encourages this to happen much sooner, it must be a good thing, and the Sitka spruce on the top of our review model certainly has a darker appearance than brand spanking new wood.

CONCLUSION

It's always a bold move to redesign an established range, but if it's done as well as it has been here, then the results speak for themselves. The 614ce is a fine sounding instrument with a wealth of tones that would find a home in any number of different musical styles. I tried standard strumming, fingerstyle and dropped tunings during my time with it and found a satisfactory result quite easily each time. With all those boxes ticked, it's safe to say that the 614 is a winner on all counts!

David Mead

TAYLOR 614CE MAPLE

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Taylor
Model: 614ce
Retail Price: £2,922
Body Size: Grand Auditorium
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Maple
Neck: Hard rock maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Taylor embossed
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 648mm
Onboard Electronics: Taylor Expression System 2
Strings Fitted: Elixir PB HD Light
Left Handers: Yes, no extra charge
Gig Bag/Case Included: Deluxe hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Revamped and reborn with a whole range of useful tones and easy playability
Cons: The "Brown Sugar" finish to the maple might not suit everyone
Overall: Taylor once again prove their might as one of the leaders in the acoustic guitar market

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★½
Sound Quality	★★★★★
Value for Money	★★★★½

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Taylor Guitars
www.taylorguitars.com

APP EXTRA
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HEAR THIS IN ACTION

EKO EGO LEGEND

A little parlour guitar with a big ego provides a fun-filled afternoon for reviewer **David Mead**

Gentlefolk of a certain age will remember the Eko Ranger 6 from yesteryear, when it was a comfortably priced mid-range dreadnought that actually sounded rather good. Since then it has achieved an almost legendary status amongst collectors and I know of one that was bought new over 40 years ago and it's still a perfectly playable, robust instrument. Times have moved on for Eko, but if this little parlour is anything to go by, it looks like the company's reputation for good tone at bargain prices still holds true.

BUILD QUALITY

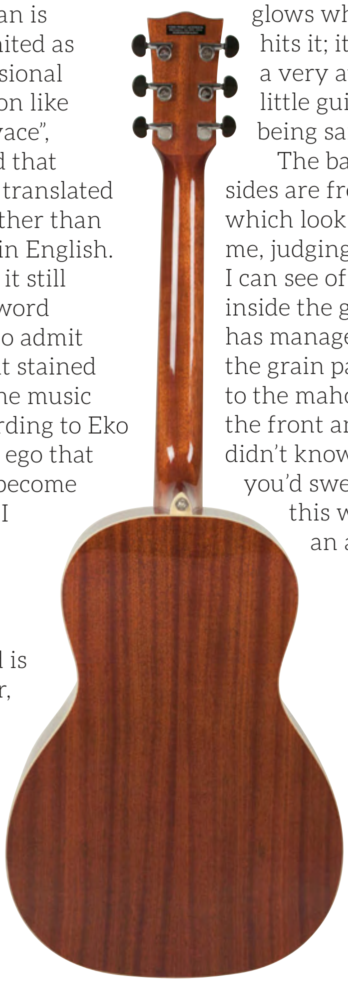
I'm really not too sure about the name of this particular series. My Italian is pretty poor, limited as it is to the occasional musical direction like "allegro" or "vivace", but I had hoped that "Ego" in Italian translated to something other than what it means in English. Unfortunately, it still means "ego", a word that you have to admit has a somewhat stained reputation in the music business. According to Eko though, it's the ego that spurs us on to become legends and so I think I can tell where they're coming from.

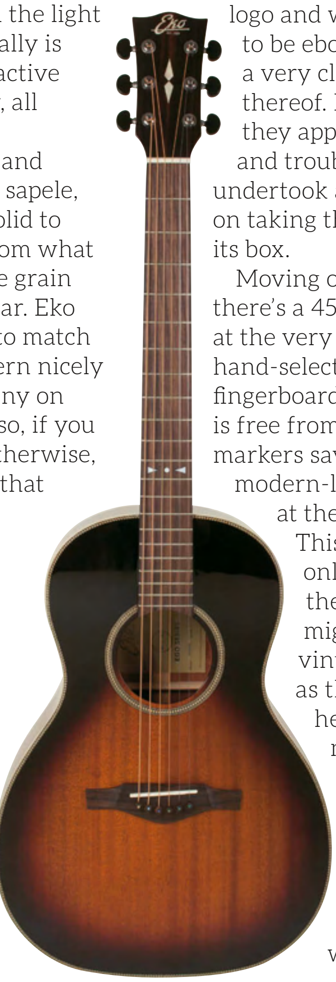
In any case, the Eko Legend is a parlour guitar, made in the Republic of China, that promises the highest quality possible and a high percentage of hand crafting in its build. It's a good looker, with a vintage sunburst and a sort of old-timey feel about it with some ornamentation that would contradict its rather modest sub-£400 price point.

On to the details, then. The Ego is, as I say, parlour sized but not too thin and elongated like some are. The styling here is possibly modelled upon pre-war Gibsons rather than Martins and Eko has managed to get that olde world chic just about right.

The top is solid mahogany with edge binding and rosette made from what the company describe as "handmade herringbone". The vintage sunburst finish sets everything off very nicely and the grain of the mahogany glows when the light hits it; it really is a very attractive little guitar, all being said.

The back and sides are from sapele, which looks solid to me, judging from what I can see of the grain inside the guitar. Eko has managed to match the grain pattern nicely to the mahogany on the front and so, if you didn't know otherwise, you'd swear that this was an all mahogany instrument you were looking at.





On to the neck now and this is hand-selected mahogany with a separate heel and scarfed headstock. The profile here is a generous C, as opposed to a vintage V, and is of the more modern thinner variety than the original thick and chunky. Luthiers have told me that neck profiling is sometimes more of an issue with customers than top wood as it directly affects the playability of the instrument concerned and I'm happy to believe it. Here, I would say that Eko has found the happy medium that will suit most players admirably.

The Ego's headstock is festooned with sealed back tuners branded with the Eko logo and what appears to be ebony buttons or a very close facsimile thereof. In any case, they appeared smooth and trouble free when I undertook an initial tuning on taking the guitar out of its box.

Moving on down, there's a 45mm bone nut at the very top of the hand-selected rosewood fingerboard which itself is free from position markers save for a quite modern-looking motif at the twelfth fret. This is really the only thing about the guitar that might contradict its vintage modelling as the fret marker here looks a bit modern to my eyes.

The bridge is rosewood once again, with a compensated bone saddle and wooden string

The styling here is possibly modelled upon pre-war Gibsons rather than Martins and Eko has managed to get that olde world chic just about right.

EKO EGO LEGEND

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Eko
Model: Ego Legend
Retail Price: £400
Body Size: Parlour
Made In: People's Republic of China
Top: Mahogany
Back and Sides: Sapele
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 21
Tuners: Eko branded die cast
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EXP Light
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Well built with shimmering trebles and a lot of projection
Cons: A little more in the bass department would raise the stakes even higher
Overall: A little guitar with a vintage vibe and a big personality at a very good price

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★☆
Sound Quality	★★★★☆
Value for Money	★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Freestyle Music
www.freestylemusic.co.uk
www.ekoguitars.it

The Eko is a finely crafted instrument with a lovely array of tones and a great deal of sit-and-play-me appeal. £400 really does represent a good deal for a little chap with a great deal to say.

The neck is hand-selected mahogany with a separate heel and scarfed headstock. The profile here is a generous C, as opposed to a vintage V, and is of the more modern thinner variety.

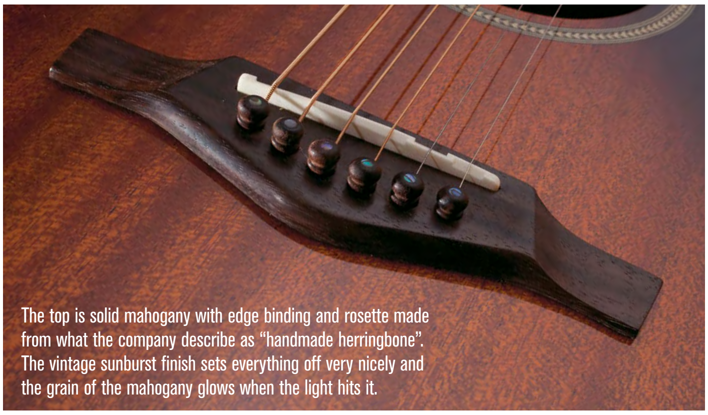
pegs. So far, everything is in very good shape – and really remarkable for the price – and I'm quite excited about what the Ego sounds like...

SOUND QUALITY

To begin with, the Ego is a very comfortable guitar to sit and play; and if standing up is your thing, Eko has provided a second strap peg on the guitar's heel for that very purpose. The C profiling of the neck is, once again, really nice in the hand and I couldn't detect any rough fret ends with a couple of finger passes up and down the fingerboard. The action is an extremely comfortable low side of medium which means that careful attention has been spent on getting both nut and string saddle just right. Quality control is obviously on form hereabouts.

On to the sound and another pleasant surprise; the trebles here are very sweet with a great deal of individuality and separation, too. There's a good amount of volume and projection with single notes singing clear and strummed chords travelling out across the room with a nice combination of power and mellifluousness.

To be honest, the bass isn't quite as full as I'd like, but what's here is perfectly adequate. It's always difficult to know if I'm being a bit hard on a parlour sized acoustic for a slight dip in the bass frequencies as the body size doesn't even suggest or even promise anything of the sort. If I had a little more time with the guitar, I would think about trying a heavier gauge of string as these feel very light to me and I think something veering more towards a .053 or even a .056 on the low E would be enough to push the bass up a little more. It's a subjective area and very dependent on style – pick or fingers, blues or folk, that kind of thing – and so don't be put off as the general voice of this little Eko is really very good.



The top is solid mahogany with edge binding and rosette made from what the company describe as "handmade herringbone". The vintage sunburst finish sets everything off very nicely and the grain of the mahogany glows when the light hits it.

CONCLUSION

Watching from the sidelines, as writing these reviews offers me the chance to do, I've become fascinated by the shift towards smaller bodied guitars that deliver more than might be apparent from their size. The Eko certainly fits into that category as this is a finely crafted instrument with a lovely array of tones and a great deal of sit-and-play-me appeal. I've played guitars that cost a great deal more than the Ego and been disappointed, but a price point that nudges £400 really does represent a good deal for a little chap with a great deal to say.

David Mead

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BREEDLOVE MASTERCLASS CONCERT

Breedlove's top end Masterclass model offers both stunning good looks and truly great sound – **David Mead** has the details…

In the previous issue, we looked at Breedlove's Pursuit model which is manufactured in China and retails at just under £700. It's the company's first step into exploring manufacture in the Far East and we assessed it as being a great deal of guitar for the money. The Masterclass Concert, on the other hand, represents the high end of Kim Breedlove's range – hand built in Oregon, USA, with sumptuous timbers and loaded with subtle tones.

BUILD QUALITY

The first thing to realise about this guitar is that it is a thing of some considerable beauty. From its characteristic headstock shape to the graceful cutaway and winged bridge, it's a work of art – and that's before you turn it over and discover the outrageously figured myrtlewood on the back and sides. But let's not run away with ourselves; seeing as the body size here is labelled as being "concert", which is pretty vague, I thought it might be good to offer up a few measurements to let you know what's what.

The body depth is a relatively trim 95.2mm, while the lower bout reports for duty at 381mm. A waist of just 228.6mm expands to an upper bout of 285.7mm, but looks a lot less because of the cutaway. This all adds up to being a very concise design, sitting as it does between parlour and dreadnought body dimensions.

It's Engelmann spruce for the soundboard, with a distinctive creamy white hue and straight grain which is offset by koa binding and a very ornate abalone rosette which is also lined with a very subtle circle of koa that extends to the inside of the soundhole.

The myrtlewood on the back and sides makes this guitar unique because no two sets of this timber are exactly the same. It's a very rare wood, as it is only found on the extreme northern coast of California up to Oregon, which is where Breedlove is based. Its rarity makes it a very expensive addition to any guitar, with makers often charging a premium of £800 or more if you want it as a custom option on your acoustic. With a density that falls somewhere between mahogany and rosewood, tonally speaking, myrtlewood can have the clarity, brightness and projection of maple with the power of rosewood. Sounds good to me, but I'll know more when I put the Masterclass through its paces a little later on. In any case, here the patterning of the wood is a misty light to mid brown with a windswept fiddleback flame. Turn the guitar through 180 degrees and it shimmers in the light. Lovely.

On to the neck now and this is made from a single piece of hard rock maple with a wonderful flame to it. Maple has been a stalwart wood for electric guitar necks for years – most notably on Fender's Strats and Teles – and I'm beginning to see more and more of it on acoustics. This might have something to do with the ongoing shortage of good mahogany, but if this is the case then maple is a very able substitute, being hard as nails and attractive to look at.

On to the front of the guitar again now and there's an ebony veneer with the Breedlove logo in mother of pearl and a contingent of Gotoh 510 tuners with ebony buttons either side of the asymmetrical headstock.

There's a 45mm bone nut here – something that always pleases me as I find it more comfortable than the conventional 43mm – and the ebony fretboard is bound with Koa and features inlayed position markers that Breedlove describe as "Masterclass Leaves" in abalone.

Moving on to Breedlove's signature winged bridge, this is African ebony with a bone saddle. Strings are threaded through the back of the bridge, as opposed to the more widely used string peg convention.

Overall, then, a thing of beauty, although some may jibe at the amount of abalone in use on the body and neck. Personally, I think the balance

BREEDLOVE MASTERCLASS CONCERT

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: Breedlove
Model: Masterclass Concert
Retail Price: £4,579
Body Size: Concert
Made In: USA
Top: Engelmann spruce
Back and Sides: Myrtlewood
Neck: Hard rock maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Gotoh 510
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electronics: LR Baggs Anthem TRU-mic
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EXP16
Gig Bag/Case Included: Ameritage hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Handsome good looks combined with some very good sounds
Cons: Might be a bit "blingy" for some
Overall: Breedlove prove that their top end instruments are truly world class

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality	★★★★☆
Sound Quality	★★★★☆
Value for Money	★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

Rosetti
www.rosetti.co.uk
www.breedlovemusic.com

This Breedlove is a thing of considerable beauty. From its characteristic headstock shape to the graceful cutaway and winged bridge, it's a work of art – and that's before you turn it over and discover the outrageously figured myrtlewood.

There's an ebony veneer with the Breedlove logo in mother of pearl and Gotoh 510 tuners with ebony buttons either side of the asymmetrical headstock. The ebony fretboard is bound with koa and features inlayed position markers that Breedlove describe as "Masterclass Leaves" in abalone.

between suave good looks and modest bling is just about right and I'm eager to hear if the Masterclass sounds as good as it looks.

SOUND QUALITY

The Breedlove's neck profile is a fairly thin flattish C that fits nicely into the hand and the slight dimensions of the body means that it's a very easy guitar to manoeuvre on the lap. Acoustically, the Masterclass rings bright and clear with a good balance between trebles and basses, nice projection and good sustain. From experience I know that the Engelmann spruce is going to warm the sound a little more as it matures over the years and this is something that will enhance the tonal picture even more. But for a guitar that is essentially still a pup, there's plenty here to get excited about already. It's always so difficult to describe tone, but there's a subtlety to the sound of the Breedlove that I really like. It makes fingerstyle pieces sing out with a good set of dynamics; play as soft as you like and the richness remains. Treat it rough with some pick-fuelled strumming and it responds accordingly, adding to its versatility as an instrument. If I was pushed, I'd say I preferred the response from fingerstyle, but that's just me; I went over to that particular dark side a long time ago.

The Masterclass is fitted with an LR Baggs Anthem TRU mic pickup system that splits the sound between an under saddle sensor and internal mic, but not exactly in the conventional manner. Unusually, the mic is the primary sound source with this system and the under saddle piezo only comes in to man up the bass frequencies and add a bit of general sturdiness to the output. It might sound complex, but the soundhole-mounted controls comprising volume, mix and phase are more than enough to do the business. The amplified sound of the Breedlove is airy and full – and the mix control really does come into its own when you're searching for a sound to suit your style. Moving from one extreme to the other means that you can easily fortify the bass whilst the trebles still maintain their sweetness. It really is a system that is ideally suited to this guitar.

Moving on to Breedlove's signature winged bridge, this is African ebony with a bone saddle. Strings are threaded through the back of the bridge, as opposed to the more widely used string peg convention.

CONCLUSION

I could have spent a lot longer with this instrument if time had permitted. I can tell that it possesses some subtleties that would probably take a while to seek out and it would be great fun finding them. I like the acoustic sound a lot; it's a very good blend of frequencies with no overriding dominance from either end of the spectrum. Plugged into an amp, which I imagine it would be a lot of the time in the hands of a pro player, the Masterclass delivers on all fronts. It's a stunning good looker with a voice to match and you really can't ask for more than that from any guitar.

David Mead

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For more information on the Breedlove range please visit:
www.rosetti.co.uk/breedlove

Breedlove
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APP EXTRA
PRESS PLAY TO
HEAR THIS IN ACTION

JAMES NELIGAN
LYN-A MINI FI

Room for a little one? **Alun Lower** investigates a pint-sized hero that proves good guitars are always welcome, even in a crowded market.

If you haven't yet bought into the travel guitar craze that has swept the guitar world over the past couple of years, then by all rights you may find yourself glancing over this review and lamenting the addition of yet another example produced by a guitar maker that just isn't Taylor or Martin. Now, granted, the Taylor GS Mini and Baby Taylor, along with the Little Martin have absolutely redefined our expectations of a "travel" guitar, but that doesn't mean there isn't room for one more name to be chucked into the hat. And the James Neligan LYN-A Mini FI certainly makes a concerted effort to stand out from the raft of clones available elsewhere by employing some really rather attractive design flourishes and offer an alternative to the rustic, stripped-back approach taken by many of its rivals.

BUILD QUALITY

As with many of the best travel guitars, the LYN-A comes with a padded gig bag free of charge. It's fairly basic and not especially thick, but it comes with backpack- and carry handle-style carrying straps, and provides just about enough protection for easy-going journeys. You wouldn't want to chuck it into the back of the car too roughly, but it's better than nothing and certainly meets all the basic requirements.

But enough of packaging – the main event is the guitar itself and you'd have to be a pretty hard-nosed snob not to appreciate the sheer good looks of the LYN-A. Amid a sea of satin finishes, the lovely gloss covering the solid spruce top looks very lovely indeed. The construction is further complemented by a very fetching rosewood laminate back and sides – in fact, if I didn't know better, it would have taken me a fair while to figure out whether the LYN-A featured all-solid construction. As it stands, a quick glance inside the soundhole reveals an impressively tidy construction – you can spot tiny blobs of glue dotted here and there but the quality of the woodwork and the overall quality of finishing is very good. The only exception to this is where the mahogany neck joins on to the body, where you'll find a little bit of build up. It's far from jarring though and really considering just how damn good this guitar looks, it's an imperfection I'll happily overlook. The rest of the guitar's aesthetic qualities are equally arresting - the unusual soundhole design draws the eye nicely without being gaudy, and the black and white binding adds more visual appeal, coming close in look to an ebony and maple pairing.

The neck has been finished in satin to contrast with the glossy body, not only adding to the guitar's visual appeal but also providing a nicer surface to play on. The quality of the finishing again is very good, with a few uneven spots but generally proving a delight to play with its slim, comfortable profile. The fretwork, too, is of a good quality – admittedly a little rough in places but overall perfectly satisfactory. Further up the neck you have a series of solid and dependable tuners with plastic, faux-ebony machine heads, and the face of the headstock sports a laminate layer of rosewood inlaid with the "JN" initials – nicely modern and minimalist. The rosewood fingerboard is a lovely example also – not overly dry and pale like some budget instruments, and inlaid tastefully with some small fret markers.

Last but by no means least, the guitar also comes packed with a Fishman under saddle pickup and a discreet, two-control preamp under the soundhole. This naturally adds to the LYN-A's versatility, but the one downside is that there is only one strap button to be found on the guitar. Having said that, with such a small body it would admittedly be a bit of a tight fit for most adults anyway.

All in all, the LYN-A is very impressively built for the price and feels very much like a potential competitor to the more established players in

JAMES NELIGAN
LYN-A MINI FI

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Manufacturer: James Neligan
Model: LYN-A Mini FI
Retail Price: £319
Body Size: Travel
Made In: China
Top: Solid Engelmann Spruce
Back and Sides: Rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 20
Tuners: James Neligan w/ black buttons
Nut Width: 43mm
Scale Length: 596mm
Onboard Electronics: Fishman under saddle pickup
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EXP
Gig Bag/Case Included: Padded gig bag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Lovely finish with a solid top, great playability, and bags of tone for numerous styles of playing
Cons: A few rough fret edges, but nothing that would put you off purchasing
Overall: Great guitar for the money – good-looking, great sounding, and addictive to play!

ACOUSTIC RATING

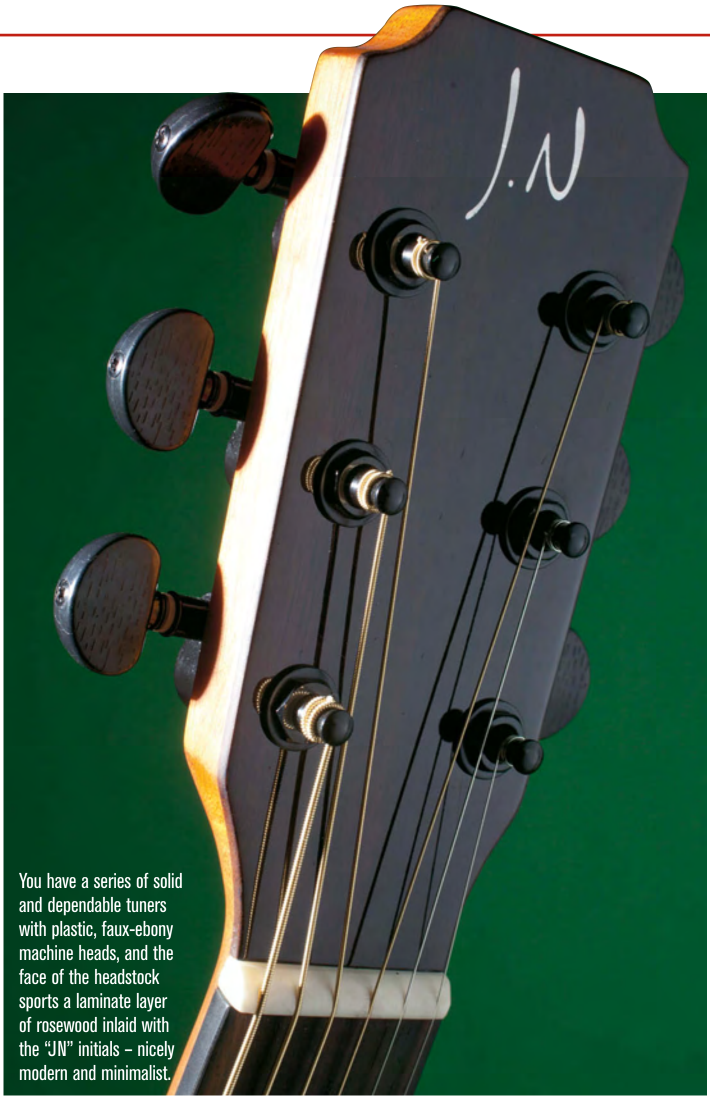
Build Quality	★★★★☆
Sound Quality	★★★★☆
Value for Money	★★★★★

5 Stars: Superb, almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

CONTACT DETAILS

EMD Music
www.emdmusic.com

The LYN-A is a charming and accomplished performer – it has a voice that demands to be heard, not to mention good looks that belie its price tag and a stack of value that includes electronics and a padded gig bag to boot.



You have a series of solid and dependable tuners with plastic, faux-ebony machine heads, and the face of the headstock sports a laminate layer of rosewood inlaid with the "JN" initials – nicely modern and minimalist.

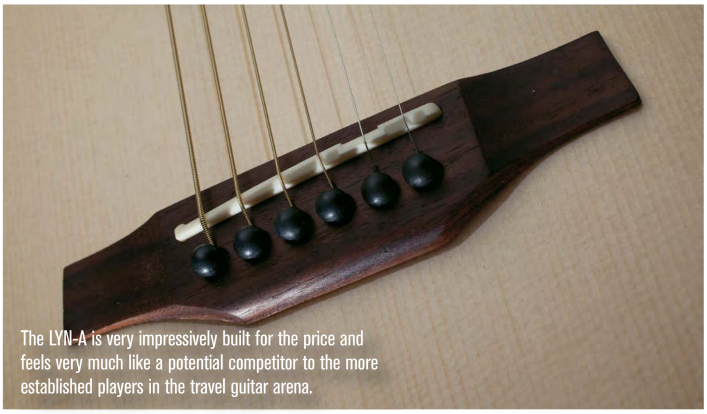
the travel guitar arena. But with the likes of the GS Mini setting very high standards of sound quality, this little number from James Neligan still has a little way to go to impress on all fronts.

SOUND QUALITY

The best travel guitars have a certain energy and eagerness to their tone and in that respects that LYN-A matches up very well indeed. Bright, sharp and very well defined, there's a certain low end clarity and high end snap to the Neligan's tone that is not usually found on instruments with more of a mahogany-focused tones. It means you miss out on some of those rich mids that mahogany guitars enjoy, but it's nice to have a change of pace for once. Laminate it may be, but the LYN-A genuinely carries much of the character of a true spruce and rosewood combo.

Percussive fingerstyle works especially well on this guitar – the high end snap and the crispness of the low notes delivers a balanced tone that doesn't get carried away at the extremities. Flatpicking by comparison sounds noticeably sharper and less dynamic, but that again is a common occurrence around these kinds of guitars. It's not bad by any means, but ditching the pick often results in a more satisfying overall tone and increased resonance.

The great thing about the laminate construction is that it results in very good projection – small in stature it might be but the LYN-A is more than capable of standing up to the voice of a full-sized instrument, offering a lovely contrast of tone that lends itself well to an ensemble performance. The plugged-in performance is pretty good for the money, offering a solid platform for live use that is perfectly happy pumped through the PA and matches nicely with basic effects. There's very little you can't do with this guitar and as long as you have realistic expectations, I really can't see anyone being disappointed with the purchase.



The LYN-A is very impressively built for the price and feels very much like a potential competitor to the more established players in the travel guitar arena.

OVERALL

The LYN-A is a charming and very accomplished little performer – it has a voice that demands to be heard, not to mention good looks that belie its price tag and a stack of value that includes electronics and a padded gig bag to boot. It's examples like this that show just how far travel guitars have come. The LYN-A will be an excellent companion on the road or simply a discreet and tidy little instrument that won't take up too much room in a small city apartment. Guitars this good are a joy to play and the LYN-A compares pretty favourably even against such impressive opposition as the likes of Taylor, Martin and Sigma. It's well-priced, sweet-sounding, and very addictive to play – what's not to love about that?

Alun Lower

PROMENADE MUSIC

01524 410 202
www.promenademusic.co.uk

6 String Acoustics

13028 - Atkin 'The Forty Three' J45
13027 - Atkin AA Deluxe Custom OOO FiguredWalnut
13022 - Atkin OO Am Special Parlour Guitar
13578 - BSG J10F Jumbo Electro Acoustic, Used
13367 - Brook Lyn 12 Fret Handmade Guitar
13189 - Brook Tamar Medium Jumbo Handmade
13188 - Brook Taw OM Size Handmade Guitar
13366 - Brook Teign Dreadnought Handmade Guitar
4612 - Dave King Katrina OOO Model, Sunburst
4613 - Dave King Louise, Koa, Parlour, Natural
13544 - Eko Oliveiro Pigini Ltd Edition Acoustic
13552 - Eko Vintage Ranger 6 in Black, Reissue
13676 - Epiphone DR500M Masterbilt Dnought, Used
9533 - Faith FM Mercury Parlour Guitar
6975 - Fender CD60, Black
6142 - Gibson Hummingbird in Sunburst
13213 - Gibson J185 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
7090 - K Yairi New Yorker NY0021B, Natural
13614 - K Yairi YT1 Acoustic Guitar
7970 - LAG T300D Dreadnought, Satin Finish
12652 - Lakewood D14 Dreadnought Acoustic Guitar
9184 - Lakewood D18 Dreadnought, Natural
9183 - Lakewood D32 Acoustic Guitar, Natural
12649 - Lakewood M14 Grand Concert
12655 - Lakewood M18 Grand Concert Acoustic Guitar
13386 - Landola D85 Dreadnought Acoustic, Used
8308 - Levin SW203 Acoustic Guitar in Black
8310 - Levin SW203Acoustic Guitar in Natural
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
6010 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13581 - Martin SWOMGT Orchestra Shape, Used
9342 - Northwood M80 12
11149 - Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG
11148 - Seagull Excursion Natural Grand SG
11162 - Seagull Maritime SWS Mahogany High-Gloss
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
13474 - Tanglewood DBT DLX F DAO Acoustic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
9587 - Tanglewood TSJ XFM Super Jumbo
9570 - Tanglewood TW40 DAN Dreadnought
13289 - Tanglewood TWJD Dreadnought Acoustic
4419 - Vintage V1100N Dreadnought, Natural
13081 - Vintage V2000MGG Acoustic Guitar
13269 - Vintage V400CSB, Cherry Sunburst
13270 - Vintage V400MP Maple Acoustic Guitar
10929 - Vintage VE2000DLX Gordon Giltrap
13272 - Vintage VJ100N XL Jumbo Series, Natural
8304 - Westcoast SW201 Acoustic, Sunburst
10932 - Westcoast SW201 Acoustic Redburst
12437 - Yairi FY84 OM Folk Acoustic Guitar
12428 - Yairi Rag 65 Small Parlour Guitar
13691 - Yamaha FG411C, Vintage Sunburst, Used
9182 - Yamaha FG700MS Acoustic Guitar, Natural
13387 - Yamaha FG720S Yamaha FG720S
13308 - Yamaha FG720S D/nought Brown Sunburst
8019 - YAMAHA FG730S Electro Acoustic Guitar

6 String Electro Acoustics

8035 - Breedlove AJ250/SF Plus Electro Acoustic
10285 - Breedlove Cascade OM/CRe Soft Cutaway
10287 - Breedlove Passport C250/COe Electro
10978 - Breedlove Passport C250CMe Electro, Nat
10294 - Breedlove Retro D/ERe with LR Baggs
10976 - Breedlove Revival DSMe Electro Sunburst
10918 - Breedlove USA Gold D/SRE
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Cutaway/Electro
9543 - Faith FSCETB Saturn Dreadnought Electro
12360 - Fender Avril Lavigne Newporter
13556 - Fender Kingman SCE, 3 Colour Sunburst
12671 - Fender Tony Alva Sonoran SCE,
12508 - Gibson J45 Custom Mystic Rosewood
13169 - Gibson LC1 Cascade, V. Sunburst, Used
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
4554 - Jimmy Moon PF0003 Electro, Pau Ferro B&S
6948 - Jimmy Moon RD3, Electro, Natural
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
9551 - Lag T300DCE Electro Acoustic Guitar
9547 - Lag T400DCE Dreadnought Electro Acoustic
12666 - Lakewood A14 CP
9186 - Lakewood D14CP Electro Acoustic, Natural
12674 - Lakewood J14 Baritone Jumbo Electro
12672 - Lakewood J14CP Jumbo Electro
12658 - Lakewood M14 CP
12678 - Lakewood M18CP Grand Concert Electro

6 String Electro Acoustics

12679 - Lakewood Sungha Jung Signature Electro
10912 - Levin 2006 Shallow Body Electro Acoustic
5407 - Levin LS500CE, Small Electro, Blue
8313 - Levin SW203-CETU Electro Acoustic Black
10933 - Levin SW203CETU Electro Acoustic S/burst
13717 - Maestro Raffles AB-CSB A Guitar
13714 - Maestro Raffles FM-CSB A Custom Jumbo
12696 - Maestro Raffles Flame Maple Cust Electro
12702 - Maestro Raffles IR-CSB R Small Jumbo Electro
12790 - Maestro Raffles MDT Small Jumbo Electro
12789 - Maestro Raffles Monkey Pod Electro
13713 - Maestro Raffles MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
12701 - Maestro Rosetta IR Dreadnought Electro
12792 - Maestro Rosetta MDT Dreadnought Electro
12596 - Maestro Rosetta with fitted LR Baggs
12793 - Maestro Rosetta MRDT Dreadnought Electro
12791 - Maestro Rosetta SR Dreadnought Electro
13212 - Maestro Singa Flame Maple Custom Electro
12594 - Maestro Singa Handmade Electro Acoustic
12699 - Maestro Singa K-CSB-K Koa Jumbo Electro
13712 - Maestro Singa MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
13209 - Maestro Singa MRDT Medium Jumbo Electro
13711 - Maestro Singa O-CSB Custom Medium Jumbo
13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
13715 - Maestro Victoria IR OOO with LR Baggs
13207 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
13208 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
13055 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
12783 - Maestro Victoria MR OOO with LR Baggs
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
13653 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro, Used
13647 - Martin GPCPA4, Natural, Secondhand
13674 - Martin OMXAE Electro Acoustic, Black
12439 - Northwood Custom Koa 80D Electro
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D/nought
6403 - Northwood R80, 0M Electro, Natural
11246 - Northwood R80-OO Electro Acoustic Guitar
12472 - Ovation 6868 Elite Standardm Secondhand
10031 - Ovation Pro Elite 2078AX
13652 - PRS SE A10E Angelus, Tortoise Shell
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10038 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
9820 - Rainsong CO-DR1000N2
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9814 - Rainsong DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10097 - Rainsong H-DR1100N2
10100 - Rainsong H-OM1000N2
10098 - Rainsong H-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10084 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Blue
10086 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Green
10085 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Pewter
10087 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Red
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
10091 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Blue
10092 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Green
10093 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Pewter
10089 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Red
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Studio
9823 - Rainsong S-OM1000N2 OM Studio Electro
9822 - Rainsong S-WS1000N2 WS Studio Electro
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
9828 - RainSong Shorty Fine Texture SFT Model
7974 - Rainsong WS1000 Graphite Guitar
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5256 - Satori YD28EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
12546 - Seagull Coastline Grand QI Electro Acoustic
9536 - Sigma 000MC 15E Electro Acoustic Guitar
12236 - Takamine EN20C Electro Acoustic
13468 - Tanglewood TPE DC DLX Electro Acoustic
13294 - Tanglewood TPESFCELS Electro Acoustic
13295 - Tanglewood TPESFCEZS Electro Acoustic
13459 - Tanglewood TW115 SSCE
13458 - Tanglewood TW130 SMCE Electro Acoustic
4188 - Tanglewood TW40 DANE Dreadnought Electro
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
8330 - Tanglewood TW40SD VSE in Vintage Sunburst
9202 - Tanglewood TW45 W OPE Acoustic Guitar
8328 - Tanglewood TW55VS Super Jumbo, VS
12304 - Tanglewood TW73 VSE
13288 - Tanglewood TWJPE Parlour Electro
13093 - Taylor 414CE Electro Acoustic, Used
13485 - Taylor 515E Electro Acoustic, Used
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
9535 - Walden CG570CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
10931 - Westcoast SW201 VT Electro, Sunburst
8307 - Westcoast SW201VT Electro Acoustic Black
8306 - Westcoast SW201-VT Electro Acoustic, Nat
13233 - Yamaha AC3M Electro Acoustic, Secondhand
13687 - Yamaha AC3R, Natural
8263 - Yamaha APX500 III Electro Acoustic, Nat
8020 - Yamaha CPX700, Tinted Finish
9191 - Yamaha FGX730SC Electro Acoustic, Nat
8141 - Yamaha SLG110S Silent Steel String Guitar

Classical Guitars

13023 - Admira Almeria Classical Guitar
13026 - Admira Concerto Classical Guitar
13024 - Admira Espana Electro Classical Guitar
13019 - Admira Sevilla Spanish Guitars
13021 - Admira Virtuoso Classical Guitar
8587 - Azahar Model 105 Cadete Classical
8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
6031 - Azahar Model 40B Classical Guitar
8584 - Mendieta Conservatoire A Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
6779 - Mendieta Estudio P Classical Guitar
6778 - Mendieta Estudio R Classical Guitar
6777 - Mendieta Estudio S Classical
8240 - Mendieta Estudio T Classical Guitar
12238 - Mendieta Estudio VCE Electro Classical
8585 - Mendieta Professional Classica Guitar
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
6335 - Ramirez 2E Classical Guitar
6028 - Ramirez 4E Classical Guitar
5251 - Ramirez AE Classical Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model
6337 - Ramirez R1 Classical Guitar
6336 - Ramirez R2 Classical Guitar
8357 - Ramirez R4 Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
5828 - Roberto 4/4 Classical Guitar
6442 - Roberto C1 Classical Guitar With Bag
6441 - Roberto C2 Classical Guitar
12302 - Tanglewood TCMR1 Classical Guitar
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red

12 Strings

6228 - Breedlove AC250/SM12 Concert Bodied
12227 - Eko 12 String Guitar, Secondhand
13553 - Eko Vintage Ranger 12 in Black, Reissue
9553 - Lag T200D12 12 String Acoustic Guitar
8322 - Levin SW206CETU 12 Strg Ele/Acoustic Gtr
9816 - Rainsong JM3000 Classic Series Electro
9817 - Rainsong WS3000 Classic Series Electro
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 Acoustic, Nat
13475 - Tanglewood TW145 12 SS CE
12706 - Washburn D42S 12 12 String Guitar

Mandolin Family

8810 - Ashbury AM-11 Mandolin (Army and Navy)
8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
8824 - Ashbury AM-370 Mandolin
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
12568 - Fender FM63S Acoustic Mandolin, Sunburst
12540 - Fender FM63SE Electro Acoustic Mandolin
10191 - Fender Mando-Strat Electric Mandolin
4551 - Jimmy Moon A Plus E Electro, Natural
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon A Plus Electro Bouzouki, Nat
4563 - Jimmy Moon Octave Mandolin (Mandola) Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
10196 - Maestro Electric Mandolin, Pre-Owned
9430 - Ozark Flat Back Bouzouki
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst
8316 - Westcoast M50E Electro Mandolin

Travel Guitars

13550 - Eko Evo Mini EQ Travel Guitar
13217 - Maestro IR3 CSB A Meridian Travel Guitar
5214 - Martin & Co LXM Little Martin, Natural
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
13324 - Martin LX Red Little Martin
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
9588 - Tanglewood TW15 Baby All Solid Travel
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar

Ukuleles

12564 - Barnes & Mullins BJ306 6-String Banjo
4371 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
8209 - Delta Blue Ukulele Banjo
8208 - Delta Blue DUB2F Ukulele Banjo
12420 - Fender '52 Tele Shaped Ukulele
13616 - Fender Piha'ea Soprano Ukulele
9080 - Fender U'Uku Soprano Ukulele
13066 - Iberica Soprano Special Ukulele, Acacia
13067 - Iberica Soprano Special Ukulele, Walnut
12338 - luke Piccolo Standard Ukulele Inc Gigbag
0000 - Kala - 6 Models instock now
12285 - Lag U100C Concert Ukulele
0000 - Magic Fluke - 6 Models in stock now
0000 - Mahalo 3 Models instock now
0000 - Nukulele - 6 Models in stock now
8515 - Ohana BK20 Baritone Ukulele
12610 - Ohana BK22 Baritone Ukulele
7101 - Ohana BK35 Baritone Ukulele
12609 - Ohana BKB35E Bass Ukulele
7102 - Ohana CK10S Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
13633 - Ohana CK15BK Concert Ukulele, Black
13634 - Ohana CK15BL Concert Ukulele, Blue
13635 - Ohana CK15GN Concert Ukulele, Green
13632 - Ohana CK15MR Concert Ukulele, Garnet Red
13631 - Ohana CK15RD Concert Ukulele in Red
12607 - Ohana CK15W Concert Ukulele
12605 - Ohana CK15Z Concert Ukulele
9050 - Ohana CK20CE Concert Uke
4466 - Ohana CK20S Concert Ukulele
13638 - Ohana CK22 Concert Ukulele
13639 - Ohana CK22Z Concert Ukulele, Zebrawood
13643 - Ohana CK23 Concert Ukulele
8520 - Ohana CK35CE Electro Concert Ukulele
8519 - Ohana CK35GS Concert Ukulele in Mahogany
13622 - Ohana CK35L Concert Uke, Tenor Neck
12603 - Ohana CK38 Concert Ukulele
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
8512 - Ohana CK50WG Concert Ukulele
13627 - Ohana CKS15E Slimline Concert Ukulele
8508 - Ohana PK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
13637 - Ohana SK10GN Soprano Uke, Matte Green
4712 - Ohana SK10S Soprano Ukulele
13636 - Ohana SK10YW Soprano Uke, Matte Yellow
13644 - Ohana SK12 Soprano Ukulele
7099 - Ohana SK15BLK Soprano Ukulele in Black
4711 - Ohana SK20S Soprano Ukulele Uke
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
8517 - Ohana SK22Z Sop Ukulele Zebrawood B&S
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4715 - Ohana SK35G Solid Mahogany Gloss
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele
7108 - Ohana SK70MG Soprano Ukulele
7106 - Ohana SK75 Soprano Ukulele
7107 - Ohana SK75R Soprano Ukulele
12608 - Ohana SKS15E Slim Electro Soprano Uke
4708 - Ohana TK10 Tenor Ukulele
4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
4706 - Ohana TK35G Tenor Ukulele
12611 - Ohana TK38 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
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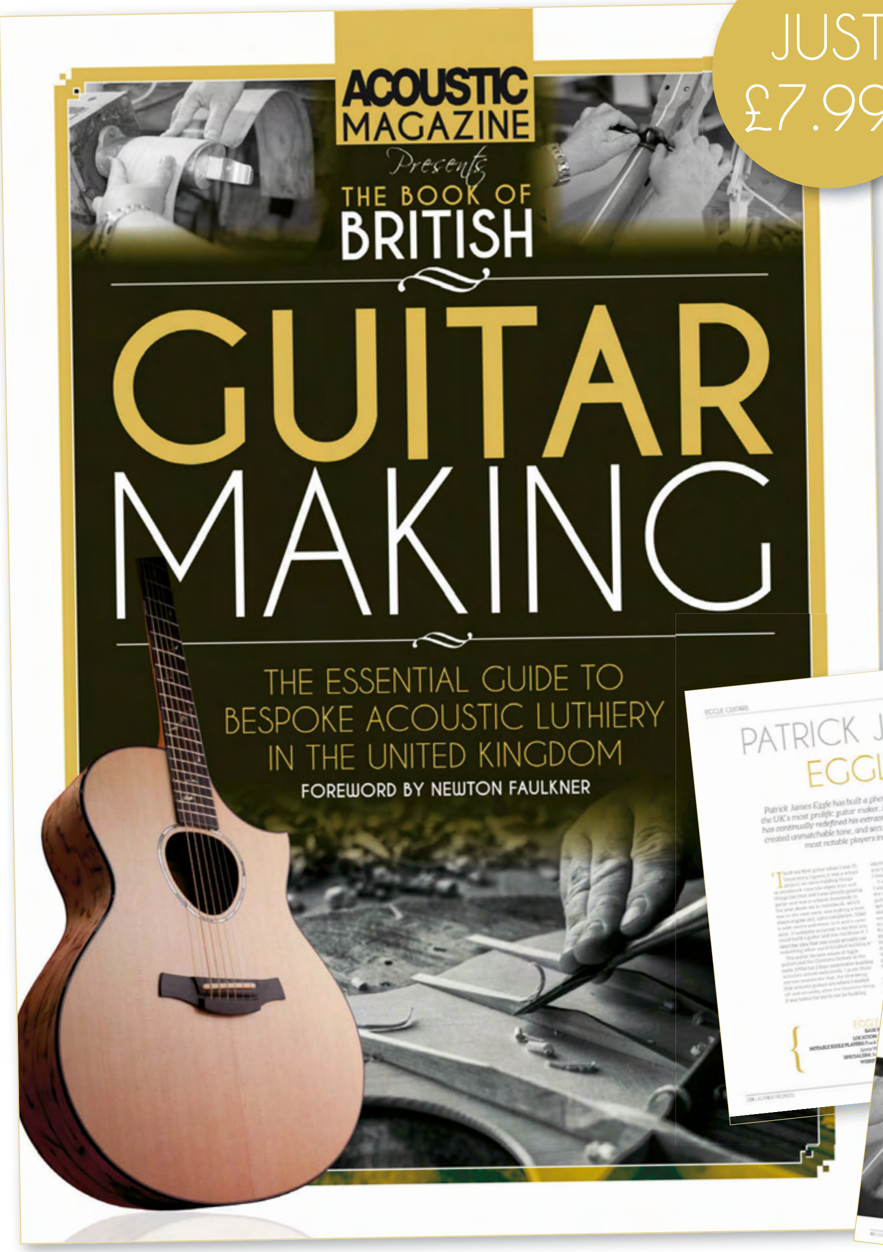

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As supporters of new music, Freshman Guitars has recently launched an interactive website which contains exclusive video footage of interviews and performances with Freshman endorsees.

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THE NEXT BIG THING

RJ THOMPSON

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES IMAGES: IAN WEST

'It's my professional name,' RJ Thompson starts with a laugh, 'because my name is Richard Thompson which is a pretty big clash with the other Richard Thompson. I used to go under the name Richard John Thompson, but it turns out that Richard Thompson's middle name is John as well, so that was out of the question,' he laughs.

RJ found himself in a lucky position in his career when Midge Ure's sound engineer heard him play at an open mic night.

'I was doing a spot at this club in Newcastle and the guy who was doing sound was the same engineer who was going to be doing sound for Midge Ure's gig at the Town Hall the following night, and he knew they needed a support for Midge's gig, so he recommended me. That led on to a big German tour with Midge, so it was a great break.'

RJ has gone on to develop a successful career in the UK and in Europe, supporting not just Midge Ure, but also Jools Hooland, Gabrielle Aplin, Sandi Thom, and the Proclaimers. So what guitars will we find in his touring rig?

'I am currently in between two Taylors. The main one that I use is a 410ce, but I also have a little GS Mini mahogany that I really love. I am pleased with the excellent sound that I get out of it for a guitar of that size, and that price as well; it has revealed itself to be a wonderful guitar. I got it with an Expression System pickup, so I have been using that on a lot of recent gigs, and quite a lot of recordings as well. It has a real character about it, and it has a really good acoustic sound, but it also has a sort of crunch about the sound if you hit the strings hard enough, and I really like that combination of sounds. That sound makes it easier to cross over to electric guitar on my live shows, because I do play a Fender Stratocaster, and a Telecaster on occasion as well. The GS Mini has been on tour with me to Europe and to America, and it is on the new EP – *House Upon The Hill* – simply by virtue of being the guitar that I have with me most of the time right now. I just sling the GS Mini on my back and away we go.'

Like most of us, there's a dream guitar on his wish list, too.

'I think my favourite right now is the Taylor 700 series. I do also dream of owning a nice Martin one day – there is something very special about them. When you play a high end Martin, you can just feel the work that has gone into making it, and the history of the wood, it really comes out in the playing experience. If I had the money, I would think nothing of paying £5,000 for a guitar knowing that I would love it and play it every day forever.'

RJ's latest EP *House Upon The Hill* offers up some wonderful arrangements and striking melodies, but they all start off with just the acoustic guitar – and 2015 will see RJ release an EP of stripped-back tracks.

'All of my songs are arranged acoustically before I take them to the band. The melodies and the chord progressions are all mine, but the little intricacies that crop up are usually from people in the band making suggestions as we work on the songs. For example, my piano player James Peacock is an amazing player, and jazz and blues influence him, so you'll find his influences cropping up in his piano parts. Input from other people always makes for a more interesting recording.'

'I used to be one of those writers who would finish every single song, no matter what, and then I'd have 50 songs for one EP, and just choose the ones that I liked the best. I have gotten much better at figuring out early on in the writing process if I don't like something, or if it is going to need more work – or even scrapped. So, for the latest EP which has five songs on it, I think I only wrote eight songs because I am getting much better at scrutinising and analysing what I am doing, as I am doing it. Lyrically, I am very keen to make sure that the song says exactly what I want it to say. In songwriting, you go through phases where you feel as though you really haven't got anything to write about. I go through patches for a month or two where I can't think of anything that moves me enough to want to write about it. For the title track on *House Upon The Hill*, I had the melody and the chord progressions together for a long time, probably a couple of years, but never had something that I thought sat really well with it lyrically. That was the last song to be written for the EP, it was finished around August 2014, and it just happened – I found that I did have something that I wanted to talk about.'

Support slots are a great way of reaching a ready-made audience – and RJ Thompson has enjoyed a number of prestigious slots, the latest being with the Jools Holland Rhythm & Blues Orchestra.

'I have been in and out of the studio over the last year, mainly because of financial restrictions, and I felt like I needed to get back out on the road, so I tried to land a good support slot. We contacted Jools' management about a place on the tour, and they were kind and encouraging. Jools' tour supports usually go to artists who are looked after by his management company, but there is always room for a newcomer on the bill as well, and I was delighted to have been asked to go along. They offered us a couple of gigs with him back in May 2014 and said they'd see how those went on – and they went very well, so we got more dates on the 2014 winter tour. I think my music goes well with his, because we have a sort of bluesy, jazzy influenced sound as well.'

'I think you have to study performers like him – especially people who have been around for a long time like the Proclaimers who I've also supported. They have a knack for audience interaction; they know exactly what to say, how to deal with rowdy crowds, and you pick up quite a lot of pointers by watching them. I found that after I went to Germany on tour with Midge Ure, I had become a much better performer without really realising it. I have never been good at talking to audiences. I am fine playing my guitar and singing, and I don't mind introducing the songs, but as soon as the song finishes, my confidence level seems to drop. Going on tour with people like Jools and Midge has taught me how to build my stagecraft. I am lucky in that the majority of the audiences we have had have been great, but everyone gets occasional nights where it just doesn't work how you want it to, and you start to think that it's not going as well as you would like it to go. A couple of years ago, that would have really affected my confidence, but I have learned to work my way thought it. A few nights ago, I thought I was heading into a bad night, but I got them onside because I made a couple of jokes, and that loosened everything up. I do enjoy a crowd with a bit about them, though – it's nice to have something to feed off of.'

RJ Thompson's EP House Upon The Hill *is out now.*
www.rjthompsonmusic.com

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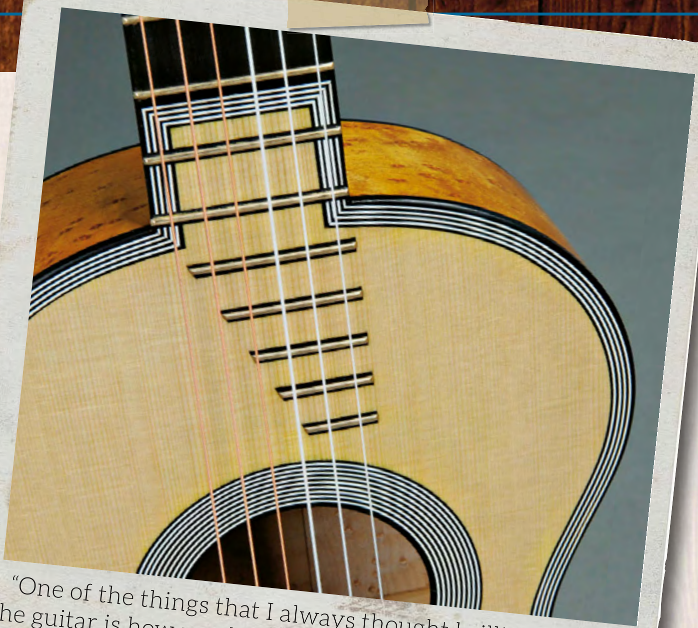
THE WORKSHOP GARY SOUTHWELL

GARY SOUTHWELL HAS BEEN AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF CLASSICAL GUITAR MAKING FOR MANY YEARS, HAVING MADE GUITARS FOR SOME OF THE LEADING GUITAR VIRTUOSI INCLUDING JULIAN BREAM AND, RECENTLY, PAUL SIMON. IN THIS NEW WORKSHOP SERIES, GORDON GILTRAP SPENT A FASCINATING TWO DAYS WITH A TRULY OUTSTANDING GUITAR MAKER.

Guitar virtuoso and *Acoustic* magazine columnist Gordon Giltrap with renowned guitar maker Gary Southwell

"After a number of years being a copyist and restoring various guitars, I got the urge to build instruments. I had this huge array of styles that I could pick from and choose things that I liked best."



"One of the things that I always thought brilliant about the guitar is how much colour and dynamics you can get – that has always been one of the fundamental things I look for in good guitar."

'The thing that got me into making guitars in the first place was playing guitars. I was in my early teens when that started. I always had an artistic temperament; I think it's in my blood as my father was a cabinet maker and so I was used to seeing him working with wood,' Gary starts from his workshop in Lincolnshire, England.

'I discovered this college in London where they were teaching instrument making. It seemed a perfect way of combining the two hobbies I had: music and playing guitar. That was the London College of Furniture. The year was 1980 and I went there for three years and learned to make guitars. I fell in love with the whole notion of doing that – a lot of people in those days didn't think of how to make a living from it – you just did it. I left college and started making guitars and I suppose I was lucky early on. I started making a lot of copies of historical guitars, particularly guitars from the early 19th century. A few of the lutenists at that time like Nigel North and Jacob Lindberg were really into the 19th century repertoire and so they commissioned me to make some of these early guitars, and that was a big start for me.'

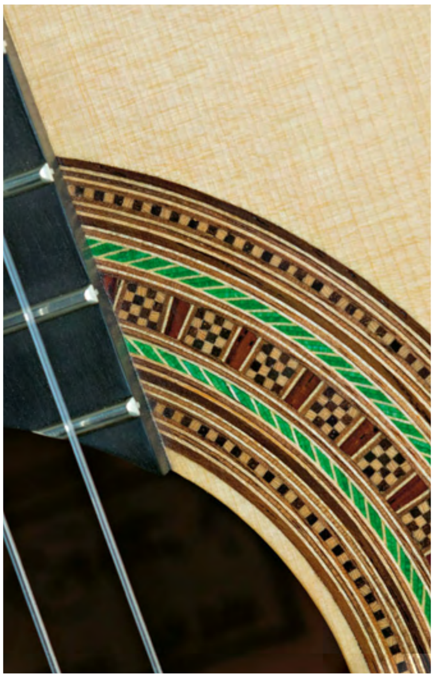
'These were six-string guitars. They were like the Panormo guitars and Lacote guitars, which were really the first form of six-string guitars – they would have dated from around 1820; that sort of period. For quite a few years, just because of what commissions were coming in, I really concentrated on making guitars from that period which was fascinating and I think the great thing about that for my career development was that I spent a lot of time travelling around Europe looking at various collections and learning a lot about the great masters of the past. I think a lot of makers now tend to start designing their own instruments straight away. I spent the first few years of my career being a copyist, but that way I learned a lot of techniques – strutting tops and things like that. I learned the different approaches to making, like the Viennese tradition is very different from the Spanish tradition of making which, again, was different to the French style of making and I could see from looking at these instruments and learn how all that worked because I was copying and restoring them. After a number of years doing that, I started getting the strong urge to build instruments. I had this huge array of styles that I could pick from and choose things that I liked best. This made me realise that there's a lot more than one way to make a guitar and certainly in the classical world of making it tends to be very based on the Spanish Torres tradition with the fan strutting, but I had seen, and know, that there are lots of other great ways of strutting instruments and putting them together to make different, great sounding instruments. I wasn't frightened of trying different things and I know that I am regarded as a bit of a maverick in the classical guitar world, but I think that's why I am still building very much in the tradition – but I've taken on board different traditions and used them in a way that feels right to me.'

With that in mind, how do you feel about lattice-braced acoustic guitars?
It's not a style I am particularly fond of. The thing I don't like about them is I find the sound to be one-dimensional, yet they do have the power and strength I know a lot of modern guitarists like. One of the things that I always thought brilliant about the guitar is how much colour and dynamics you can get, and that has always been one of the fundamental things I look for in good guitar. A complexity of voice and a great dynamic colour range. That modern style of making doesn't do that, it just does big and powerful and that's actually detracting from one of the special things that the guitar has. Through history, the guitar has always had this criticism thrown at it that it's not a powerful instrument. I think both guitarists and makers just have to content themselves with the fact that it's not a big powerful instrument, but to actually celebrate the great things it has.

Yet many acoustic guitars can fill a huge concert venue, demonstrated by some of the players who use your guitars...
They can, but the great thing about the guitar is that its colour possibilities are greater than something like a piano. A great player will be able to draw an audience to the sound of the instrument. You don't have to play loudly to pull people in – I think that's a thing that players often forget.

Are you still experimenting with strutting, and do you change with each instrument you make?
Over the years, the experimentation has continued, but there are no big changes these days. It's not like, "Right I'm going to start from scratch and do something wildly different". I look at what I have done over the years, and I can actually see a connection through everything. I've made some big changes, but now it is mainly refinements I make.

Now, manufacturers can X-ray instruments, but I assume when you started building you just had to loosen the strings to get your hand inside and get some idea of instrument dimensions by feel.
Yes, you can use mirrors and small measuring tools, but in those days it was very touchy-feel. People buy the plans for guitars and they'll make a guitar copy from those plans, but I always say to people when they are interested



in making reproductions of some of these guitars, if you can go and see an original yourself and make your own plans then you truly must. I try to make everything as dimensionally correct as I can, using the same materials, but at the end of the day you are interpreting an instrument from the 19th century and it's your interpretation that gives it a certain character. Wood is an individual material, so when you are working with a piece of timber, even though you've got the dimensions to work, it's still down to you – particularly with the final thing of tuning the top to find the right place to vibrate regardless of the dimensions of the original.

For me, the Hauser was the ultimate guitar sound. One thing that is absolutely glorious about the Hauser, and something that was very important to Julian Bream, was the warmth of the sound and how it had a really big sonorous bass. Of course, you always need the balance and you need those singing trebles. The whole thing about that was the incredible warmth that Hauser got. I spent many years with Julian trying to get that. That actually has become the sound of all the instruments I make. I love having the warmth of an instrument. In my very first meeting with Julian, when we spoke about making a guitar for him, he emphasised how important this warm sound was and he said if you think about the range of the guitar, it's actually closer to a cello than it is a violin. He was complaining that too many guitars sound thin and violin-like. He said, "When I play the bass register, I want it to feel like that low end on a cello when it resonates against the body." As far as possible with a guitar, I think we achieved that. That has become a thing, even in my A Series guitar; that quality is always there. I think any good player can make a guitar sound bright with some edge to it, but if that warmth is not in the instrument no matter how high up you play, you can't develop a warm sound. It goes back to the idea of having lots of colour in the instrument, I think for me if you start off with a nice warm, rich sound, then everything else will come from that.

The trick, then, is to get a good treble. Most people can get a good bass, but it's getting that great treble right up the neck and consistency right across the fingerboard.

That is always the challenge. It sounds a bit mysterious to me and a bit of a black art because you don't know what a guitar is going to sound like until it's finished and there's more to it than just replicating an instrument.

Did you feel that you were very fortunate to have access to a Hauser guitar that was originally owned by Rose Augustine – and one that she latterly loaned to Bream? Did you have a kind of spiritual approach to it, like getting inside the mind of Hauser when he was making it?

Yes, very much so. With all the great instruments I've looked at over the years and either restored or copied I always, rightly or wrongly, get a strong sense of the person who made it and I'm very intrigued to think about what their life was like, who they were, and their idiosyncratic personalities.

What is the greatest sounding guitar you have ever heard?

It's actually a 10-string guitar made by Johann Gottfried Scherzer that was made around 1850. It has six strings on the fretted fingerboard and four extra bass strings on the second fingerboard that wasn't played on. If we are considering this was made in 1850, he put iron bars inside. If you think about it, this was a period just after the iron-framed piano had been invented. That made a radical difference to piano construction and I think there was an element of trying to use some of the iron frame technology. He also had a sort of double back guitar – there was a back shield on it, the idea of which was to stop the body of the player dampening the sound of the instrument. So it was an incredible sounding instrument with that wonderful bell-like quality. I think that sound, above all others, has been the sound that I've had in my head that I bring to my instruments.

Read the next part of Gordon's meeting with Gary Southwell in the next issue of Acoustic. *For more information on Gary and his guitars, visit his website:* ***www.southwellguitars.co.uk***

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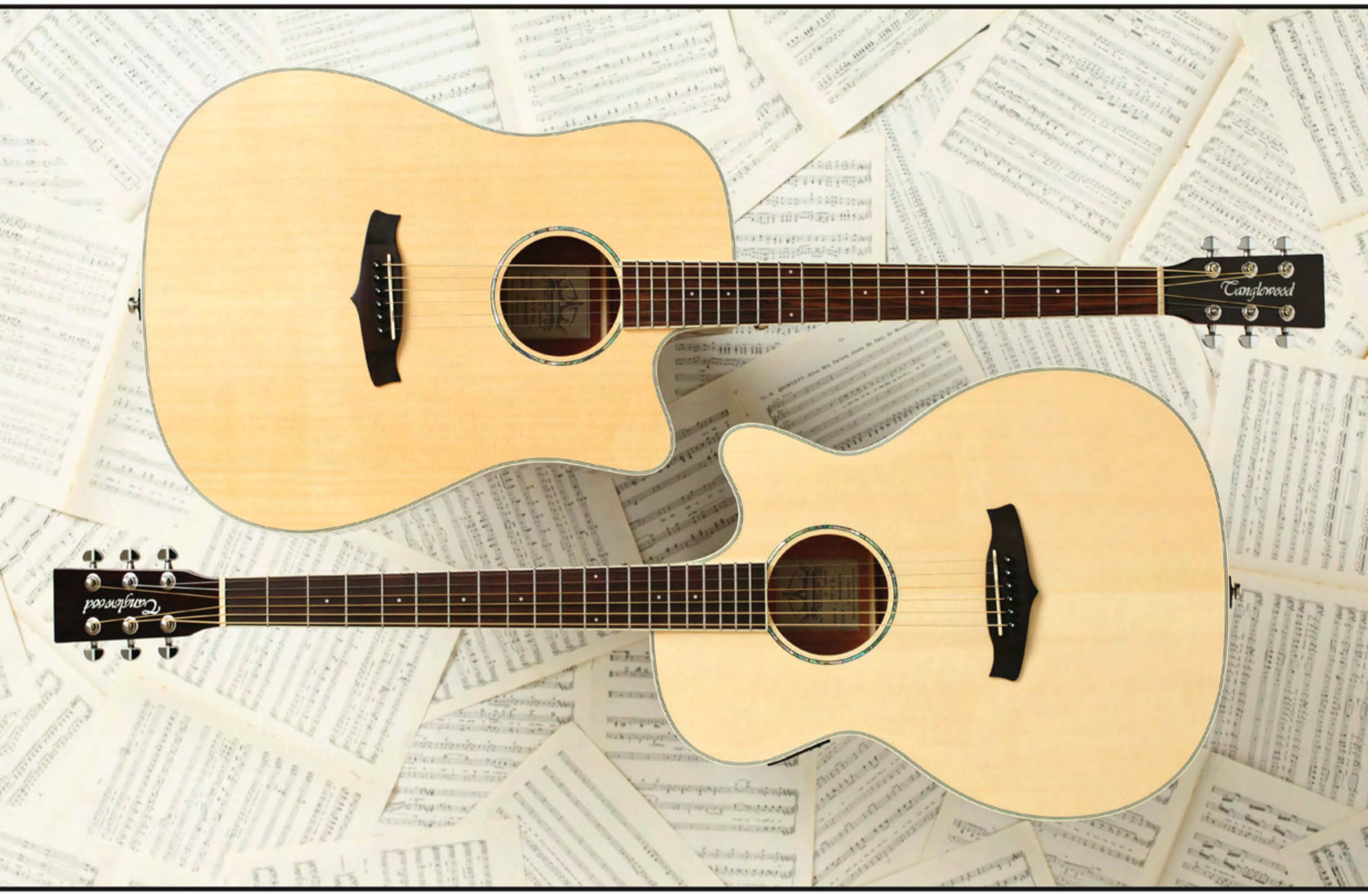

A note from Michael Sanden...

After working with Tanglewood for eight years now, I am still reassured and impressed by their relentless search for improvement and absolute perfection. My latest brief was to develop a bracing system that would release the intricate & delicate tonal character of their solid tops in a similar way to that found on one of my Sanden instruments or any other high end, handmade, boutique guitar.

Our work in this regard has taken almost two years of testing and led us to finally establish the "Tapered Parallel Bracing" system, a design that retains solid structure in all key areas yet enhances the full flexibility of the top and allows the timbers ability to breathe and flow along with the variable attack of the player.

Try this new system in the Premier SE range. In my opinion, this is as good as it gets!

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12 STRING CORNER

Lonnie Donegan, Lead Belly, and 'Rock Island Line'

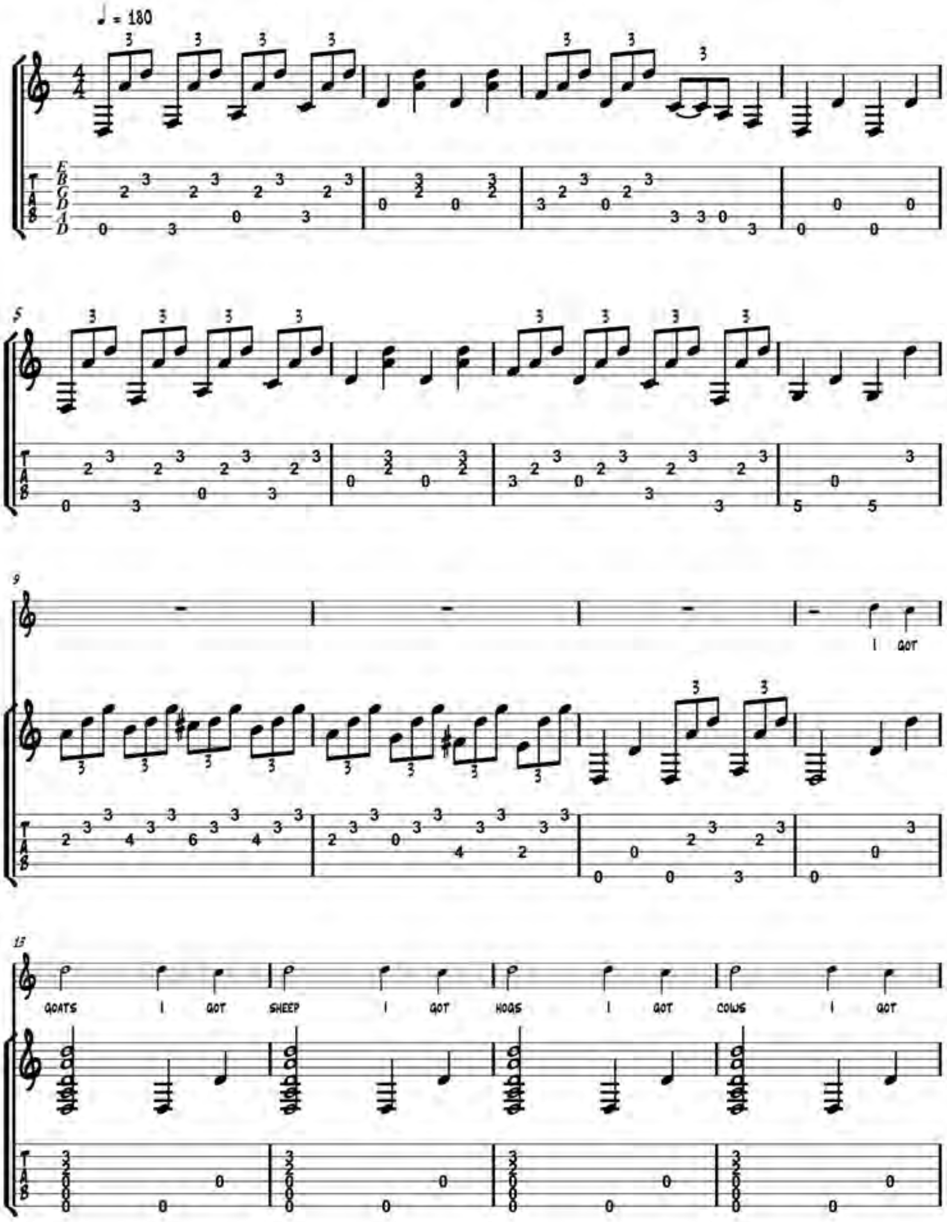
Many people believe that if it weren't for Lonnie Donegan, there would have been no British pop music scene as we know it today. Lonnie influenced me no end; he stepped out of his banjo role with Chris Barber's jazz band and slung a guitar round his neck and gave the UK a whole new brand of music which the youth of the day took to in the blink of an eye. When I first heard Lonnie's version of Lead Belly's 'Rock Island Line', it was a breath of fresh air.

Looking back at the roots of blues and jazz gave Lonnie the inspiration to come up with a new way of presenting iconic songs that had long since been forgotten by the masses. Of course, Lonnie went on to have a very successful career with a string of his own hits and he never lost his love for performing live. I was fortunate enough to play in his band for a while in the early 70s when his guitarist quit early into a long summer season in Blackpool where I was resident with The Cyril Stapleton Orchestra. Lonnie was top of the bill and so the change over was easy for me. Every song we played had been a hit for him. Before each show, we'd sit in his dressing room, eat fish and chips out of a newspaper, and strum out Lead Belly songs. He absolutely loved Lead Belly. After I left at the end of the season to pursue my band, he would contact me regularly and ask if I would rejoin the band – something I never did. I do keep in touch with his drummer Marc Goodwin and have very fond memories of playing those great songs with a true British legend.

The iconic "king of the 12-string" as Lead Belly is often referred to, transcends generations. His story is well documented, yet if it wasn't for the input of many artists through the subsequent years who regularly perform his songs, he could have been long forgotten like many others. The rock bands of the 60s – like the Rolling Stones – headlined the revival into Afro-American roots and blues music, and used many ideas from that genre to create their own highly successful brand of music. This month, I am going to add my contribution to the Lead Belly legend by offering you my arrangement of 'Rock Island Line' which is entirely different to the original, and to Lonnie's, but it is one which provides 12-string players another rendition of a truly great roots song.

Paul Brett

ROCK ISLAND LINE ARR. PAUL BETT



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A recipient of numerous national and international awards, Laura Snowden won First Prize at the Ivor Mairants Guitar Award 2014 and is supported by the Julian Bream Trust. This series features the traditional classical guitar repertoire alongside Laura's many collaborative and compositional projects, including her folk group Tir Eolas, whose recent performances include the Royal Albert Hall and Bestival.
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COLLECTORS' COLUMN

Guitar decals and inlays – like them or loathe them, they could bring you some extra cash on the collecting market, as Paul Brett explains.

Guitars have always carried adornments of some kind. Whether it's simple fret dots, heavy pearloid or wood inlays through to full body decals that were popular in the 30s and 40s, they've always been there. Adornments can add value to an instrument but, more importantly, they reflect some of the key trends of the period that the guitars they appear on were made in. Obviously, cowboy guitars carried decals associated with all things "cowboy" and thus clearly framed the guitar into a certain nostalgic era. There were many designs used, from the floral decorations of Oscar Schmidt Stellas to the Hawaiian-based dreamy stenciled designs that reflected a romantic holiday feel, such as that on a Harmony Moonlight Bay. A sales gimmick? They most probably were at the time of release, but still a valued piece in the guitar's historical timeline. The Schmidt Stellas were sold with some very attractive on-body designs and there have been, and still are, some incredible onboard inlays around – particularly on custom builds as they do add a certain individuality to the instrument.

The main area of such inlay is usually on the guitar's fingerboard. Do all of these artistic embellishments make the guitar sound better? Of course not, and in some elaborate cases, they may distract from the instrument in question. Collectability values lie in the inlaid guitars of the 30s, yet the latter stenciled inlays are starting to pick up interest and value, too. It's also well worth looking at basket case guitars for spares. I have mentioned this before in a previous article as the spares market continues to grow. For example, an original 12-string Stella tailpiece can fetch over £800 today – even though there are replicas that'll do the job just fine. Hofner spares are in demand and sets of machine heads can cost between £50 or £175 depending on the model and rarity. A pair of original Beatle Bass pickups from the early 60s can set you back over £600! Car boot sales and small local auctions are still a good source for picking up non-functional instruments and stripping them for spares.

There are no set rules when it comes to what spares to look out for – it only takes one person who wants to restore and replace a broken or dysfunctional part on a guitar, so as a rule of thumb, everything is a target. Original cases are also in demand as many of them don't survive in their original condition. Old Gibson Les Paul cases from the 60s can fetch around £200. ES-335 cases are between £100 and £175. 60s Gibson archtop cases are over the £250 mark. So, as you can see, with the right research and luck, you could set up a good little sideline business for not a lot of outlay and you can offer it all online without having to set up a physical shop. So what is 2015 going to bring for collectors? I believe that acoustics are still the best bet for investment and growth, and it's also worth looking at 50s and 60s Kay guitars, Harmony guitars, and Silvertone electrics. It is always worth looking at brands that have not yet appeared into the collecting market – and also rare and one-off items. Since the popularity of ukuleles has soared over the past few years, brands like Kumalae are commanding very healthy prices and I can't see it subsiding for a while yet.

Paul Brett

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10 BANJO PLAYERS TO LISTEN TO NOW

Leon Hunt counts down the 10 most influential banjo players to have walked the earth…

When putting together this top 10 of the most influential banjo players of all time, I needed to make a decision. Do I consider everybody that plays a stringed instrument with a drum for a body, or focus on just the players of what has now arguably become the most popular variant of the banjo, the 5-string, or as he Gibson Company would have it, "regular" banjo. My initial consideration was that it might be difficult to distil the notable exponents of an entire family of instruments down to a top 10. My thoughts then drifted towards the berating I would surely be subjected to from banjo enthusiasts of various musical persuasions if I stayed within the safe confines of my own particular branch of the banjo family tree. So in the interest of a quiet life I decided to bite the bullet and attempt to take on the entire family, but with a big disclaimer; I'm going to have my 10-year old daughter randomly decide the order in which the players are listed. She makes no secret of the fact that she's not a fan of the banjo, nor will she have heard of many, if any, of the players on the list, so if you think I was wrong to put Barney McKenna above George Formby, talk to my daughter (she just can't believe I didn't include Taylor Swift).

EARL SCRUGGS
1924 – 2012

Earl is the undisputed father of bluegrass banjo. Scruggs almost single-handedly devised his own brand new three-fingered approach to the five-string banjo, not only drawing on his own first-hand musical experiences from in and around his native North Carolina, but also integrating musical vocabulary from further afield, most notably the New Orleans jazz that was so popular at the time. Through his endless observation, tinkering and refinement, Scruggs successfully devised his own heavily stylised musical language. He managed to integrate and approximate blues and boogie-woogie lines while retaining a decent level of compatibility with the music he wanted to be a part of. Many of his trademark phrases and licks are characterized by the clever integration of open strings and techniques such as hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides. Scruggs first came to the attention of mainstream audiences when he joined Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys in 1945 but after a few years he and Monroe's guitarist, Lester Flatt left the band to form The Foggy Mountain Boys or Flatt and Scruggs as they later became known. It was with this band that Scruggs recorded the majority of his seminal music.

***Listen to:** Foggy Mountain Jamboree (1957), Foggy Mountain Banjo (1961), Folk Songs of Our Land (1962)*

GEORGE FORMBY
1904 –1961

Players of "full-sized" banjos as we know them today will often get all hot under the collar when asked if they play any George Formby. "He played the ukulele," they shout at me. True enough, and hopefully he'll also make it into the magazine's top 10 ukulele countdown as well when that's published in the next issue. However, it was a banjo uke that he played, and what a great player he was too. Formby's trademark fast and syncopated right hand technique, often called "splitstroke" still confounds many players today (myself included). Although it's almost impossible to think of George Formby without thinking of the banjo ukulele, it was as a star of film, and later TV that he really made his name known. Pretty much all of Formby's recorded output was originally released as singles. During the 1930s and 1940s, these were mostly shellac 10" 78s but later in his career they would have been vinyl 7" 45s. These days there are a multitude of excellent compilations available, most of which will almost certainly have versions of some of his illustrious hits, including: 'When I'm Cleaning Windows', 'My Little Stick Of Blackpool Rock', 'Leaning On A Lamppost' and 'Mr. Wu' among them.

***Listen to:** It's Turned Out Nice Again (2005), The Best Of George Formby (2009)*

BILL KEITH 1939 – PRESENT DAY

By the time Bill Keith came onto the scene, bluegrass five-string banjo players were wondering if there could be more to the instrument. Players such as Bobby Thompson and Carroll Best began to develop what has now become known as the "melodic" style, but the most well known of these early pioneers was the young Bostonian Bill Keith. While Keith was primarily a bluegrass musician – like Scruggs, he actually spent some time as one of Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys – his musical understanding and aspirations were far more eclectic. His 1976 debut solo album *Something Auld, Something Newgrass, Something Borrowed, Something Bluegrass* is regarded as a watershed moment in the evolution of the five-string banjo. There's a great version of 'Auld Lang Syne' played on his "trick" tuning pegs, now known as "Keith Tuners".

***Listen to:** Something Auld, Something Newgrass, Something Borrowed, Something Bluegrass (1976)*

BÉLA FLECK 1958 – PRESENT DAY

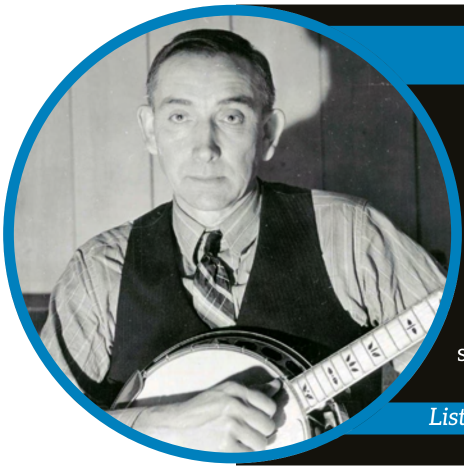
Fleck is arguably one of the most accomplished musicians to have ever picked up the five-string banjo. His one-man musical crusade over the past few decades has completely changed people's perception of what the five-string banjo is capable of. The record books confirm that Béla Fleck has been nominated in more musical categories than any other musician in Grammy history! Fleck took the staple "Scruggs", "Reno" and "melodic" styles, thoroughly mastered them, developed them, and then set about assimilating stringed instrument techniques from just about every genre and instrument on the planet. Add to this his unquestionable musicality and improvisational ability, and the end result is, well almost intolerable actually, at least for us "post-Béla" banjo players, trying to find the odd musical gap that he's not already filled and won a Grammy for.

***Listen to:** Deviation (1984), Drive (1988) The Acoustic Planet (1995)*

PETE SEEGER 1919 – 2014

If Seeger did nothing else, his 1948 instructional book, *How to Play The Five-String Banjo* would justify his place in this top 10. It's amazing how many notable players still cite this book as their "beginner's bible". It's also worth noting that some of the technical terms still very much in use by many fretted instrumentalists, such as "hammer on" and "pull off", were first coined by Seeger in this very book! As a banjo player, by today's standards he was fairly idiosyncratic, drawing partly on old-time "clawhammer" or "frailing" technique, partly on Scruggs-esque three-fingerpicking and the rest being made up by himself, largely from folky guitar technique and his need to accompany his own politically driven protest songs. As if all this wasn't enough, Seeger also designed his own style of banjo known as The Seeger long neck banjo.

***Listen to:** If I Had a Hammer – Songs of Hope & Struggle (1998)*



WADE WARD 1892 – 1971

Ward was an important figure in the world of old-time music, and especially the banjo. His contributions to the clawhammer style of playing the five-string banjo have helped shape the way old-time banjo players play today. Ward lived as a farmer in Independence Virginia his entire life and never became a professional musician, although he did perform and compete regularly at the world famous Galax Old Fiddlers Convention and travelled with various bands. Most notable was the fabulously named Ballard Creek Bogtrotters, with his brother, neighbour, nephew and their family doctor as well as recording several solo albums he was also recorded extensively by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress in the American Folklife Centre.

Listen to: Music of Roscoe Holcomb and Wade Ward (1962), Wade Ward: Banjo & Fiddle (1961)

EDDIE PEABODY 1902 - 1970

Dubbed "The King of The Banjo", Peabody quickly became a popular solo performer on the American Vaudeville circuit playing his plectrum banjo. The plectrum banjo began life as a five-string with the short fifth string removed, enabling players to ditch their fingerstyle technique in favour of a much louder plectrum style. Peabody's technique was extraordinary and his popularity is largely responsible for the plectrum banjo making the transition from modified five-string to bona fide instrument. As well as playing a big part in the development of the Vegavox resonator banjo, he also delved into the murky world of electric banjos with his "Banjoline" – a six-string instrument, tuned the same as a standard plectrum banjo (CGBD) but with octave pairs on the third and fourth strings.

Listen to: The Banjo Wizardry of Eddie Peabody (1956) Mr. Banjo's Back In Town (1967)

DON RENO 1927 – 1984

Reno was another of the chief movers and shakers in the banjo's initiation into bluegrass music. Scruggs and Reno were contemporaries, likely influenced by similar music, and ultimately tried to achieve similar goals, but the end results were quite different. Reno's main contribution to bluegrass banjo was what has now become known as single-string playing, but for many years this was just called "Reno style". While Reno's sound was more of an acquired taste, due to the brashness of his approach, especially compared to Scruggs, Béla Fleck, and subsequently numerous post-Fleck players have since taken Reno's lead, refining it and making it a massive part of modern banjo playing. It's also worth noting that Reno, along with Arthur Smith was half of the original 'Duelling Banjos' duo (originally called 'Feudin' Banjos').

Listen to: Reno and Smiley – On Stage (1958), Smith & Reno – Feudin' Again (1979), Fastest Five Strings Alive (1976)

BARNEY MCKENNA 1939 – 2012

At the start of the 1960s, McKenna, along with his band the Dubliners, introduced the banjo to traditional Irish music. At first this was met with mixed feelings, but today the tenor banjo has gone on to become one of the most popular instruments in the genre. The lack of a suitable instrument around the McKenna house and the timely presence of an unused banjo is reputed to be largely responsible for this famous pairing. There were probably plenty of unemployed banjos (and one can only assume banjo players) kicking around Ireland at the time, due to the instrument's relatively short-lived popularity at the turn of the century. McKenna played a 19-fret (four string) tenor banjo – tuned one octave below the fiddle (GDAE).

Listen to: The Dubliners – A Drop of The Hard Stuff (1967), The Dubliners – 25 years Celebration (1987)

CHARLIE POOLE 1892 – 1931

Charlie Poole's approach to the banjo was largely dictated by an injury that he'd incurred after betting someone he could catch a baseball without a glove. This wager resulted in him breaking his thumb and ending up with an arch in his right hand. This didn't slow him down though. With his band, the North Carolina Ramblers, Poole went on to make and sell an impressive amount of records. The band's 1925 release *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down Blues* sold 102,000 copies. This number is remarkable if you consider how few people at that time owned record players. It wasn't only his banjo playing he became well known for, he also made a name for himself for his "olympic standard" substance abuse, with the stories painting him as a kind of pre-war, banjo playing equivalent of Keith Moon. A 13-week drinking binge killed him at the age of 39.

Listen to: Charlie Poole And The Roots Of Country Music – You Ain't Talkin' To Me (2005)

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IN THE LOOP

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR REHEARSAL TIME

Live looping isn't just a great performance tool, it's great for practice and composition too. You can come up with a few chords or a riff and instantly play over it. You can use different scales and arpeggios and experiment with different phrasing over chords or any idea you want to try. As an arranger, you can try lots of different guitar parts instantly and work out what works best for the song. You can even record guitar parts and listen back on the fly. Any idea you have, you can try out in the practice room and all this will help you become a better performer, whether you are playing with loops or a full band.

When practicing, it's very easy to get stuck in a rut with your playing and to play the same old clichés. If you practice the same old pieces and scales, you can never really move on, you need to try different things – find material that challenges you. Try focusing on the areas of your playing you find difficult rather than pieces that fall easily under your fingers. Try some new techniques, concepts, theory, improvisation, scales and arpeggios. To improve your timing, play to a metronome, especially when setting up your loops. Develop the coordination between your feet and hands by tapping to the beat – this will help you to get your loops in time.

Remember to start your practice session with a simple warm up like the one shown in **Example 1**. This is a chromatic exercise which goes across the neck of the guitar moving up a semitone every time. Keep this going right up to the highest fret of your guitar. Start playing slowly at maybe 80bpm along to a metronome then increase the speed until it becomes more challenging. If you are playing with a pick, try and play each note with an alternating upstroke and downstroke. After this, you'll be warmed up and ready to start looping.

This month's loop is in an unusual tuning; the lowest E string is raised up to F so it's FADGBE, the amazing acoustic guitar player Michael Hedges used it on occasion. The low F lets us play some interesting sustained drone notes underneath our chord progression and will stop your hands falling into the playing positions that you know best, because they simply won't work in a different tuning.

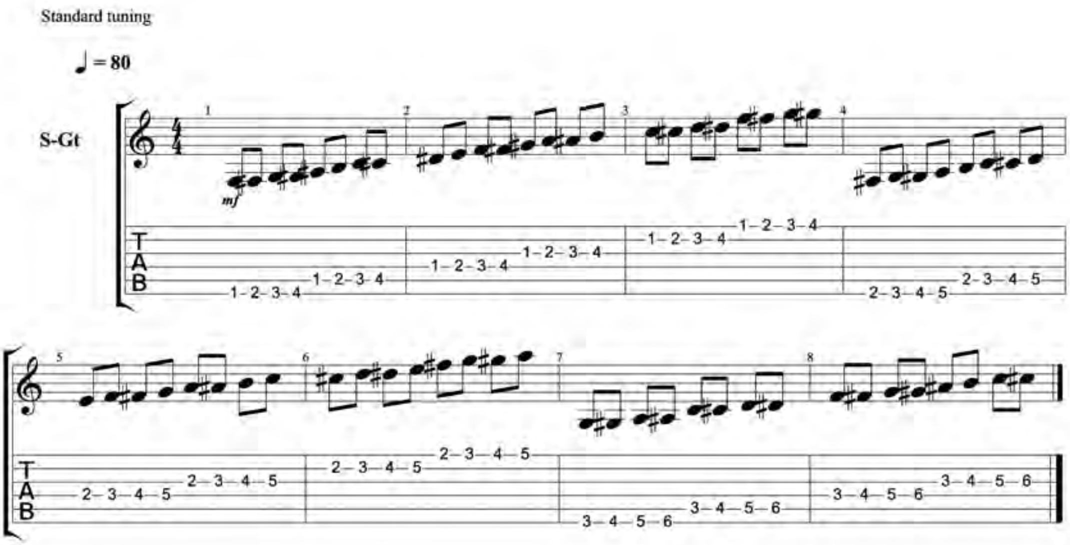
Hit record on your looper pedal and record in the sustained chords in **example 2**. The chord progression is Fsus2, Fsus2 (no 5th), Fmaj7sus2 (no 5th) then A# and A# minor/C#. Focus on really feeling the rhythm by tapping out the beat with your foot. If you ever find yourself speeding up or slowing down, play along to a metronome for a while and get the feel for the pulse of the loop. Getting your loop in time can be tricky at first, but it does get easier with plenty of practice.

One way to push yourself as a player is to try different techniques. If you play with a pick most of the time try fingerpicking, and if you're a demon fingerpicker try playing with a plectrum. Playing in a style you are less comfortable with will force you play in a different way. **Example 3** is a picking exercise; play it with the picking technique you are less familiar with, either fingerpicking or with a pick, whichever you use least. Hit record and play example 3 over the held chords from example 2 and leave it looping. When picking try, to ensure that the low F note is sustained underneath the chords in the first four bars.

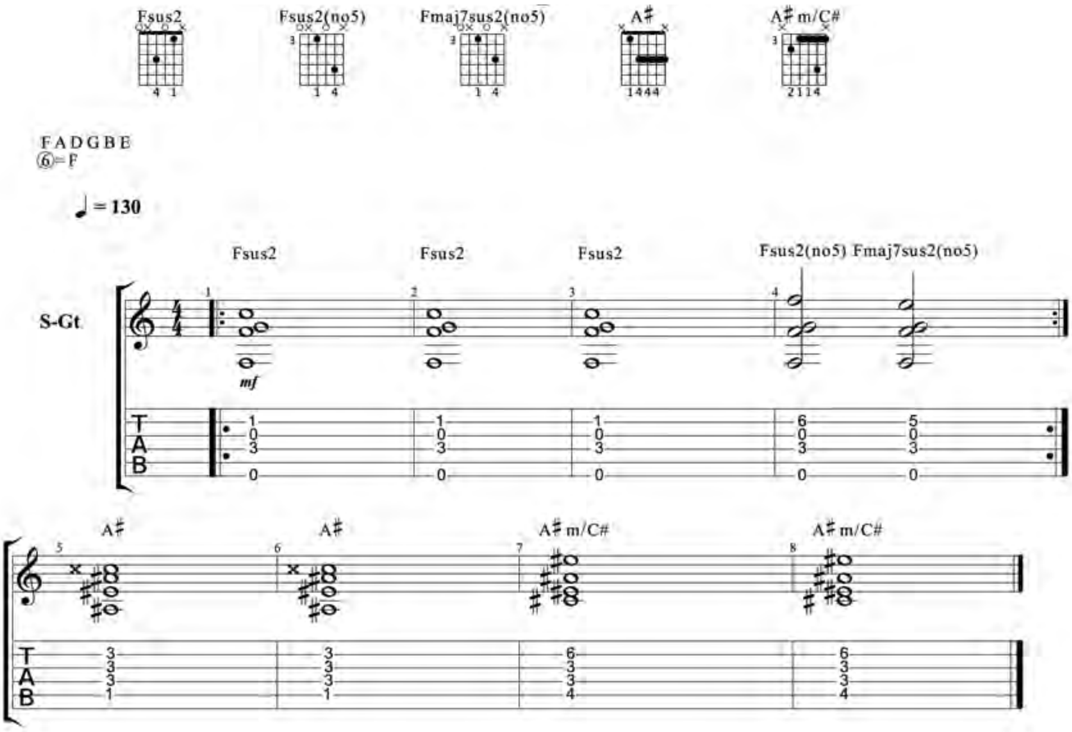
Now you can try playing some lead guitar over this. Initially try playing triads of the chords over the sequence to get a feel for the song. **Example 4** shows some possible triads for the chord sequence played in eighth notes. Once you are familiar with these triads you can start to add in more chromatic and colouring notes and start to think about phrasing and creating interesting melodic parts. If you know what works, you can bend the rules in interesting ways.

Example 5 demonstrates a melodic solo based on these triads that you can practice against the loop you have created in examples 2 and 3. Notice the phrasing, the rests between the notes, and the alternating fast and slow

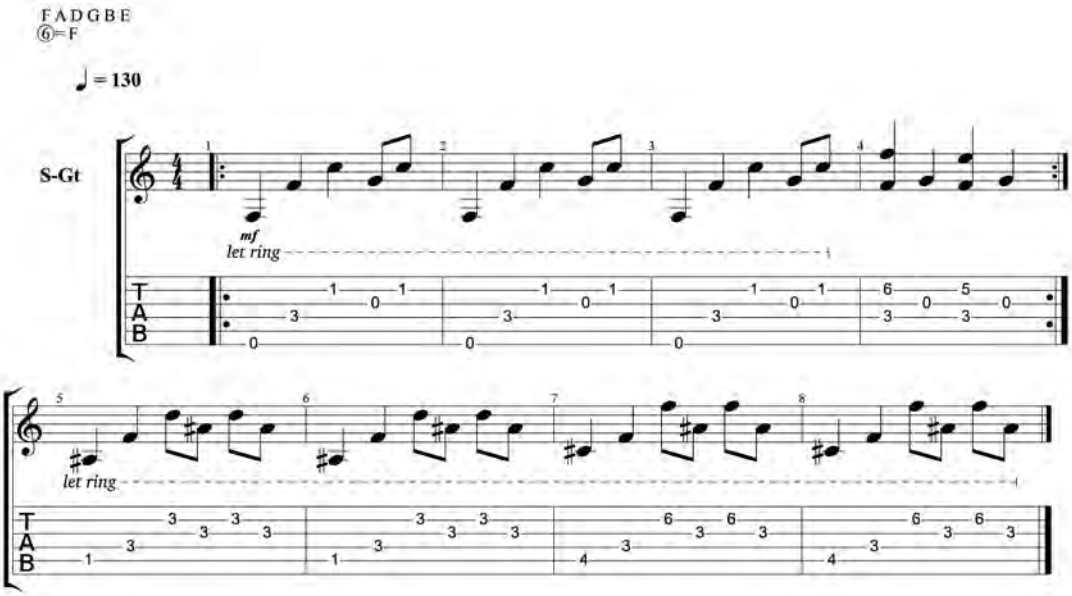
EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



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sections. Notice the use of diads – two note chords used to create interest and the repeated call and response melodic sections. Try and think like a composer rather than trying to show off your technique, communicate with your audience with interesting melodic parts rather than going in with all guns blazing. Fantastic guitar technique can be exciting and impressive but it's not the whole story. It's often interesting to end your solo section with a high note, here we have used a picked tremolo effect to add a little excitement. Try and think of your lead breaks as a mini composition with a beginning, middle, and end, even if they are only a few bars long. The string skipping in the final four bars can take a while to get up to the correct tempo but, as ever, practice along with a metronome slowly and then build up speed over time.

In addition to practical loop-based playing, it's really useful to try to include ear training and theory in your practice regime. Knowledge is power and theory is helpful in developing your own unique approach to the guitar. Working on ear training will allow you to accurately hear and identify musical elements in your head while listening to, reading and analysing music. Just knowing and being able to hear the different intervals of simple scales and triads will help you to play more interesting guitar parts.

It's all about looking at the instrument from another perspective to make things seem fresh again. Keep trying to play things that are slightly beyond your ability – it'll help you to improve as a player. Learning classical guitar can be really useful for a country musician and learning country can help classical musicians to develop their own style. I'll leave you with a quote from renowned journalist, writer, and author William Safire: "Last, but not least, avoid clichés like the plague".

Matt Stevens

MATT STEVENS

Instrumental Composer

Matt Stevens is a musician and composer from London. An instrumental artist, he uses an acoustic guitar and sampler to create multi-layered tracks live. His music has been described as "a guitar orchestra". He plays live all over the UK and listens to Sonic Youth, Carcass, Nick Drake, Cardiacs and King Crimson. He is constantly recording new music for several projects.

www.mattstevensguitar.com

NEW MUSIC

IAN CARR

WHO HE?

www.iancarr.com

It's refreshing to come across a musician who doesn't take himself too seriously, but has the chops to suggest that beyond the smiling façade lurks the spirit of uninhibited genius. Such is the case with Ian Carr, a man with accolades by the bucketful for his work with the likes of Kate Rusby, Eliza Carthy and all parts in between. This is his first solo album and weird and wonderful it is. Recorded in Sweden, starting with the jaunty 'I'll Call You', a tune that alternates between a Captain Pugwash hornpipe feel, and slower passages hinting at wide open skies and landscapes, a decidedly Scandinavian feel haunts many of the tracks. Allowing plenty of space for reedy viola passages and wheezing harmoniums, Ian's guitar underpins gorgeous soundscapes that owe more to Sigur Ros than any Celtic hangover. Spellbinding.

JULIAN PIPER

THE STAVES

IF I WAS

www.thestaves.com

There's nothing new about the UK's musicians recycling American music to its homeland, and the Staves – a post Mumford trio of sisters with glorious harmonies from downtown Watford – did for a time look set to honour that well worn tradition. But with this latest album they've come up with a set of songs that are located nearer home, with barely a log cabin in sight. That said, the girls supported Bon Iver on tour and those mysterious gentle voicings he favours creep into songs like the floating 'Black And White' and 'Damn It All', strings rising to a soft minor key crescendo before the vocals cut in. And if a lament like 'Don't You Call Me Anymore' would normally seem too sugary for man nor beast, embedded in the Staves intriguing musical miasma, it works.

JULIAN PIPER

CARRIE MARTIN

WHAT IF?

www.carriemartin.co.uk

Carrie Martin is a golden voiced singer from Hull whose crystal clear delivery recalls the glory days of Eva Cassidy. This is her second album since her "comeback" from the rigours of domesticity, and an ambitious project with luminaries Gordon Giltrap, Ric Sanders and Oliver Wakeman all chipping in. But the lynchpin of the 10 self-penned songs remains Carrie's delicate fingerpicked guitar, often acting as a perfect foil for Giltrap's glorious fills. Highlights include the gliding beauty of 'My Love' with Ric Sanders in support, and Gordon Giltrap's 'Passing Of A Queen' – one of those melodramatic sounding folk songs that is a perfect showcase for not only Giltrap's wonder, but Carrie's gorgeous honeyed vocals.

JULIAN PIPER

KATHRYN ROBERTS & SEAN LAKEMAN

TOMORROW WILL FOLLOW

www.kathrynroberts andseanlakeman.com

As an enduring presence on the UK Folk scene for almost two decades, Mr. and Mrs. Lakeman can boast the kind of track record their Californian cousins might well envy. This time around, eight thoughtful self-penned songs cosy up to a couple of traditional outings, 'Robber Bridegroom' and 'Child Owlet', both of which revel in tales involving graves and bodies torn to pieces, almost a mandatory 'Johnny B. Goode'-like mantra, beloved of folkies from Dartmoor to Durham. But carnage aside, Kathryn's 'Song To Live By', a beautiful song of reassurance dedicated to her daughters, and the haunting 'Soft The Morning Sun', prove once again that these guys are something very special.

JULIAN PIPER

THE MULLIGAN BROTHERS

VIA PORTLAND

www.themulliganbrothers.com

Calling the Alabama based Mulligan Brothers one of the "most talked about bands working in the USA", as their blurb suggests, seems optimistic, but their well honed soft rock sound is the type of stuff that historically wins over America's airwaves. Harking back to the halcyon days of west coast soft rock, Ross Newall's vocals on the mid-tempo 'I Don't Want To Know' plunge the band squarely into safe easy listening mode, Gram Rea's fiddle stepping into decorate an otherwise bland affair. The feel-good factor continues with 'Bad Idea', reassuring us that bad ideas lead to beautiful days, and the memories of Christmas lights on the old oak tree on 'Road That Leads Me Home.' It's all very nice, inoffensive, beautifully recorded and the guys' harmonies are faultless.

JULIAN PIPER

STEVE EARLE & THE DUKES

TERRAPLANE

www.stevearle.com

A man of many faces, sometimes it feels as though the blues was about the only thing left that Earle hadn't messed with, but then Earle's always been about the blues, and with his disordered personal history, he can steal a march on many of today's fresh-faced blues wannabes. So it's no surprise to find that there's more than a little devil strut about these tracks. From the rasping harmonica that introduces 'Baby, Baby, Baby', Steve's tongue-in-cheek approach, backed up by musicians who know that less is more, allow the songs to breath as they should, rather than acting as an excuse for instrumental overkill. Sure the devil and the crossroads get in on the act as Steve raps out 'The Tennessee Kid', but he knows he's not the king of the blues that he sings about in the closing number, and it's Steve's subjective stance that makes this a great album.

JULIAN PIPER

THE UNTHANKS

MOUNT THE AIR

www.the-unthanks.com

Following hard on the heels of their ship building soundtrack, it would be a steely heart indeed that would fail to be moved by the majesty and grace of the Unthanks 10 minute long title track. Something of a mini epic, after the vaguely audible far away strings and Tom Arthur's evocative trumpet introduction, the song gradually builds, the girls' winsome vocals weaving in and out of a backing that owes more to the moody grandeur of Miles Davis or minimalism of Brian Eno, than what might be expected from your standard "country folk" outfits. But then the Unthanks have always steered away from such preconceptions, and by the time the album concludes, it's difficult to imagine such stunningly beautiful music being pigeonholed by anyone. Definitely in a field of one.

JULIAN PIPER

ROBERT EARL KEEN

HAPPY PRISONER

www.robertearlkeen.com

Texan singer-songwriter Robert Earl Keen makes no bones about the fact that he's not a bluegrass singer, but admits it's always been part of his life. And listening to this album produced by pedal steel wizard Lloyd Maines, it's easy to imagine that to be true. Something of a departure from his usual alt-country comfort zone, classics like Jimmie Rogers 'T For Texas' – on which he's joined by Lyle Lovett – and the traditional 'Long Black Veil', become energised by Keen's cracking band. An album of unexpected twists and turns, Richard Thompson's boy meets girl motorcycle saga 'Vincent Black Lightning', Pete Rowan's reflections on a broken down bus trip with bluegrass legend Bill Monroe, and an atmospheric duet with Natalie Maines on 'Wayfaring Stranger', make this very fine Lone Star Grass indeed.

JULIAN PIPER

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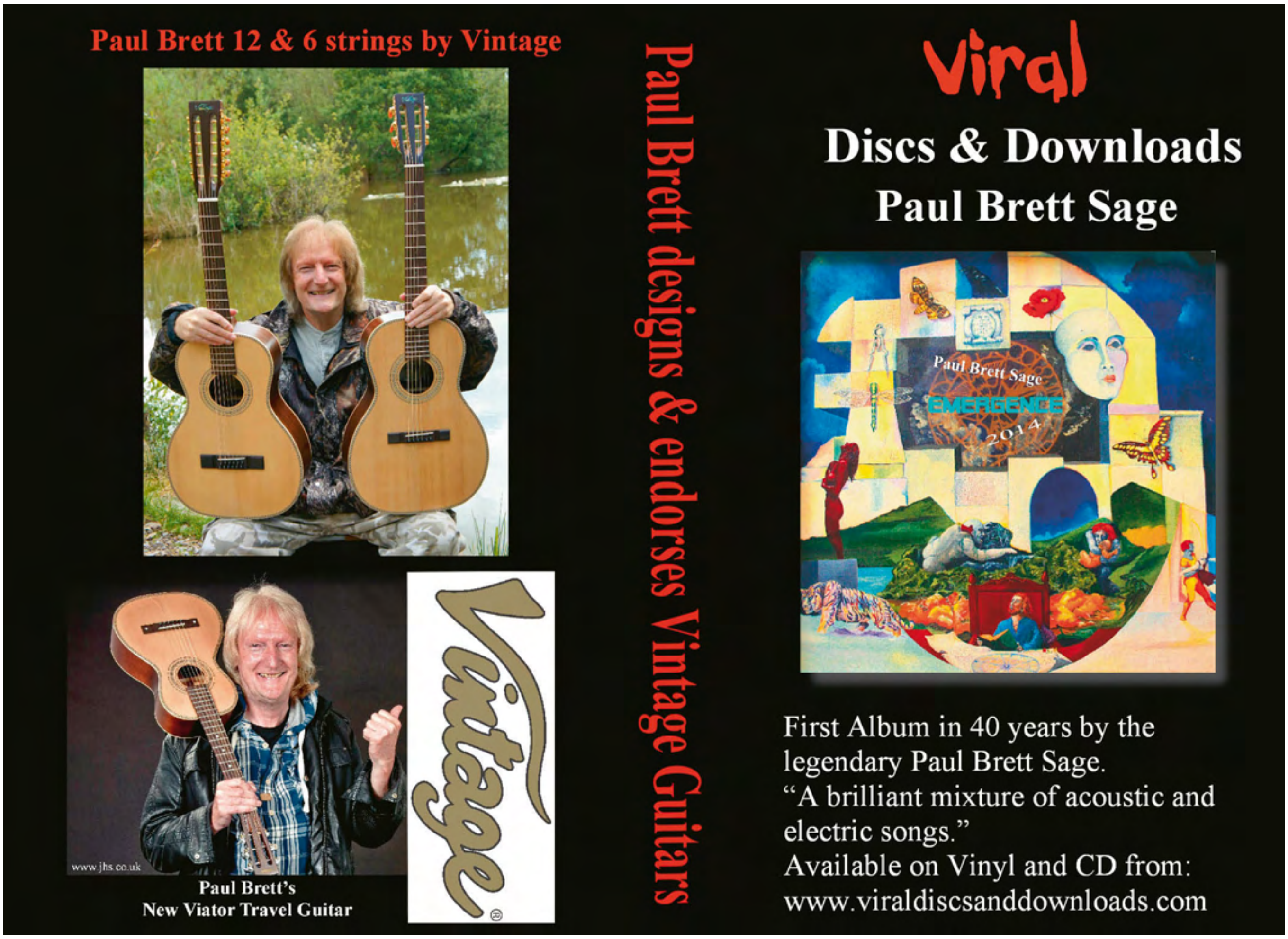
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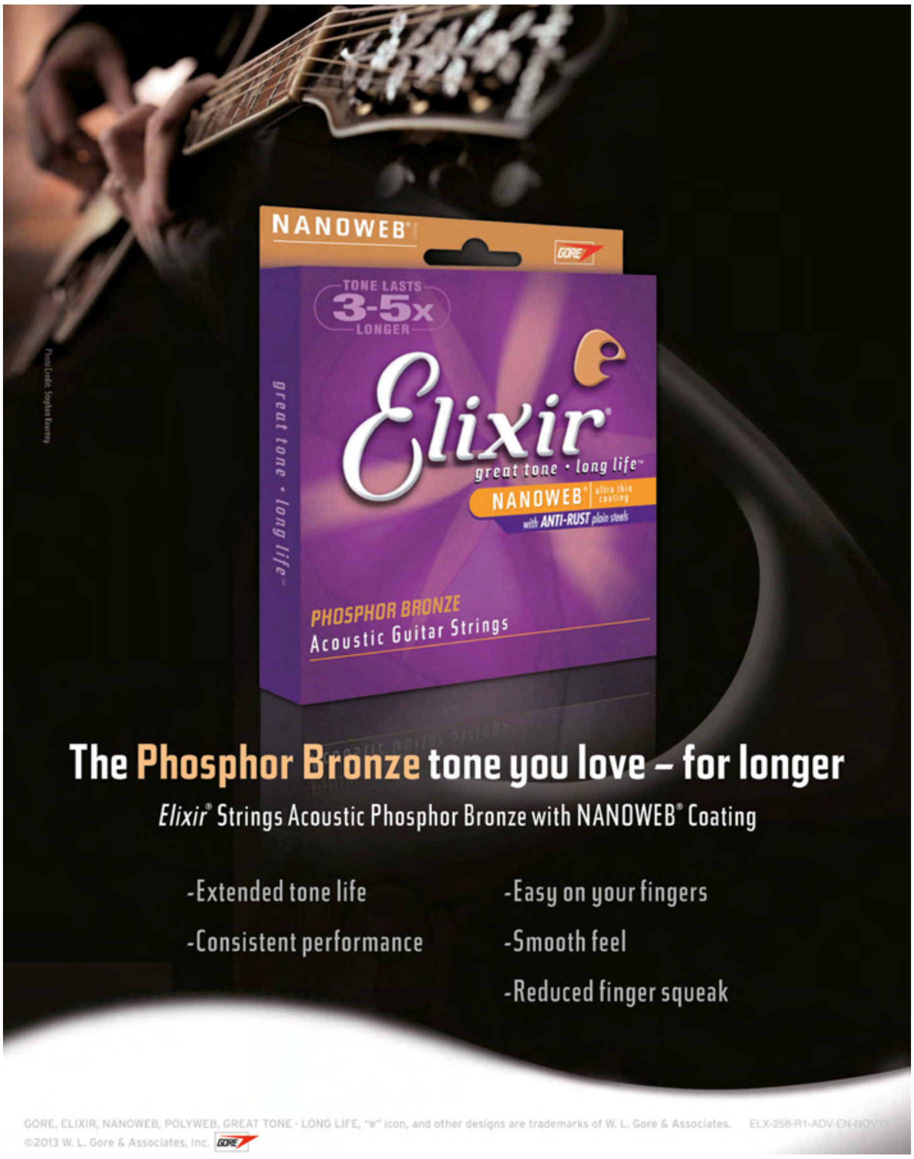

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CLIVE CARROLL
Acoustic Virtuoso

Essex boy Carroll was born into a family of musicians and 35 years on he finally got a job writing for Acoustic magazine. In between, he spent a lot of time waiting around in airports, filing his nails and befriending theatre sound technicians.
www.clivecarroll.co.uk

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

CAMPANELLA ARPEGGIOS

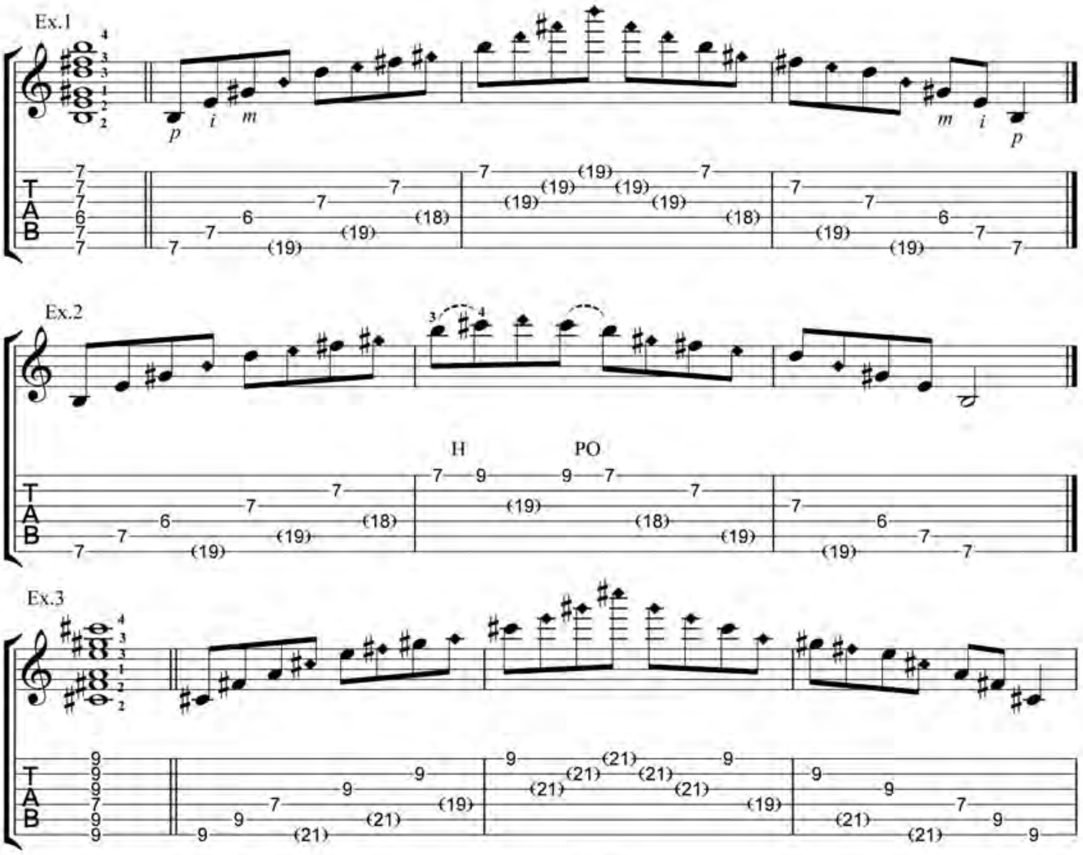
USING HARMONICS – PART 2

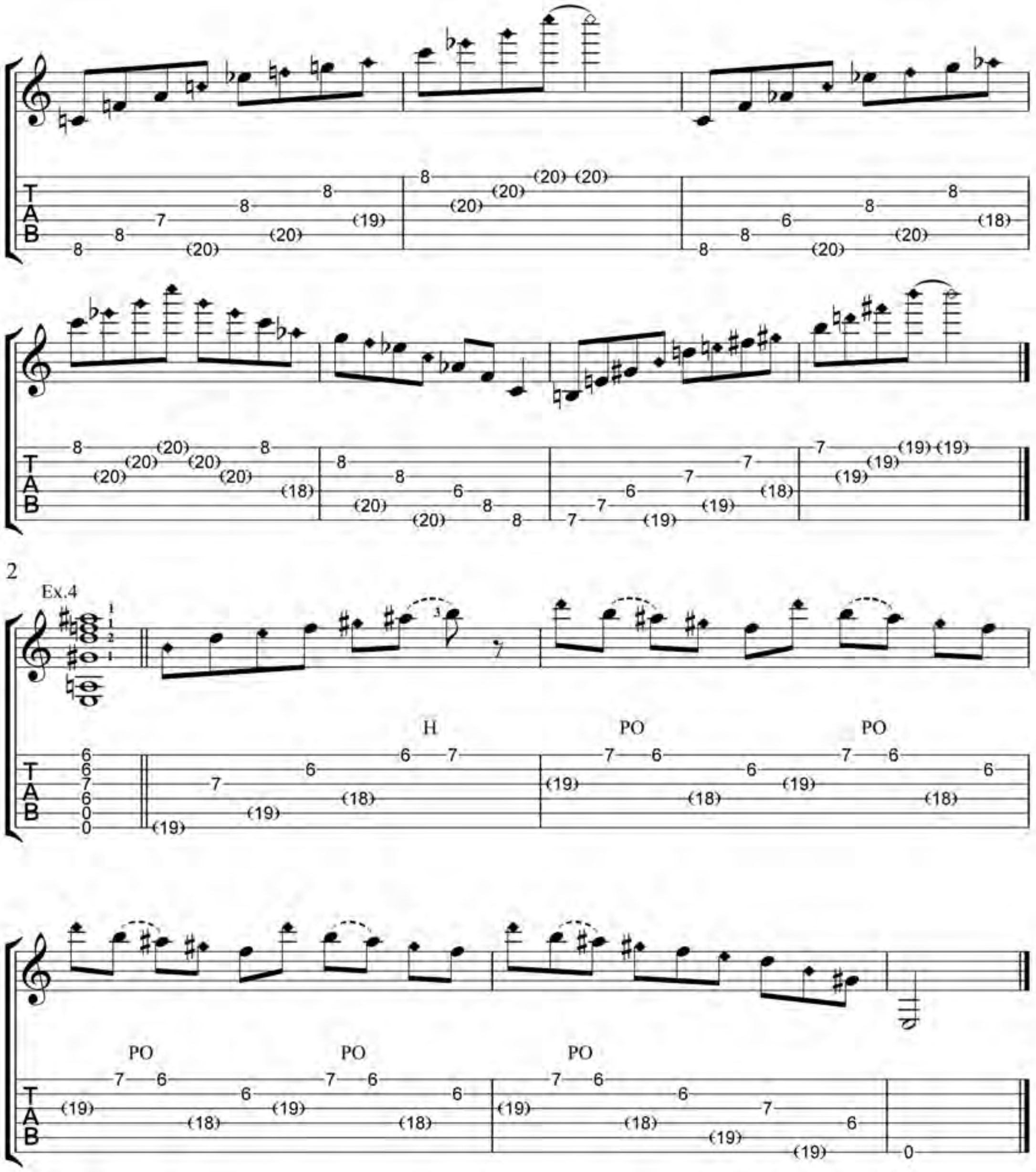
In the previous column, we took a look at bell-like arpeggios by incorporating plucked notes and harmonics to create a campanella or harp effect. Some refer to this as the "artificial harmonics" technique. Following on, here are 10 more progressive exercises, which I hope you will find useful. Some are extensions of the exercises in Part 1, while others are little gems I've picked up on my travels. All harmonics have been notated with diamond heads on the staff score and in brackets on the tablature staves.

Example 1
Firstly, form the chord of E9 as printed at the start of the exercise. The opening three notes are plucked with thumb, index then middle before the first harmonic is sounded on string six at the nineteenth fret. This is done by lightly pressing the index finger on string six above the nineteenth fret wire and at the same time sounding the note by plucking with the thumb. The further away the thumb is from the index, the clearer the sound will be. Next, pluck the third string with the ring finger (or 'a'). Continue to alternate between harmonics and plucked notes as previously described. The harmonics in bar two are plucked consecutively for the most part and though there is a quickening of the right hand, all notes throughout the exercise should sound even.

Example 2
This is a variation of example 1. Once again, the same chord of E9 is formed but finger three should cover the top three strings leaving the fourth free for the hammer-on at the start of bar two. This exercise might feel tricky to start with, especially because the first string detail needs to be clear. Take regular breaks as a little more pressure is required from the fretting hand!

Example 3
This one begins by fretting the chord of F#m9 as printed at the start of the exercise. Run up and down the arpeggio as in exercise one before moving to the chord of F9. This time I ended on the high harmonics. Next, move the first finger of the fretting hand back one fret to form the chord of Fm9. Play as written before





shifting once again, this time to the chord of E9. You will pick up the pattern and feel free to continue to fret one! I find this exercise very useful for plucking hand accuracy.

Example 4
I picked this one up from Tommy Emmanuel and he told me he learnt it directly from Lenny Breau. Once again, form the chord at the start before tackling the arpeggio. In bars two and three, think in groups of five quavers. The final two nineteenth fret harmonics need no fretting from the other hand. It's the chord of Bb7/E or Eb9#11– what a sound!

Example 5
This is a diminished chord exercise. Familiarise yourself with the shape transitions in the first bar before moving forward. There is a lot of leaping about so accuracy is extremely important.

Example 6
As in the previous exercise, a harmonic note and a plucked note are sounded at the same time. The two chords shown are Am7 and D13 but feel free to experiment with other chord shapes and some other chord progressions.

Example 7
The exercise opens with the chord of E9 and in bar three after which the shape shifts up a fret to form F9 before returning to E9 in bar five.

Example 8
Here we have an arpeggio using the whole-tone scale!

Example 9
This is a fun way of playing Eb#9/Fb; I sometimes like to apply the "harp" technique to this chord as an intro. The conclusion is fascinating as the penultimate note Fb harmonic on string six is resolved on string four.

Example 10
This is an excerpt from the opening of my piece, 'Les Petites Clochettes' which demonstrates the use of harmonics on the third and fourth frets. To be precise, the sounds are created by playing just behind the fourth fret wire, and just in front of the third fret wire. It might take a while to feel out the harmonics but the result will be satisfying and I hope the technique may be useful for future arrangements.
Clive Carroll

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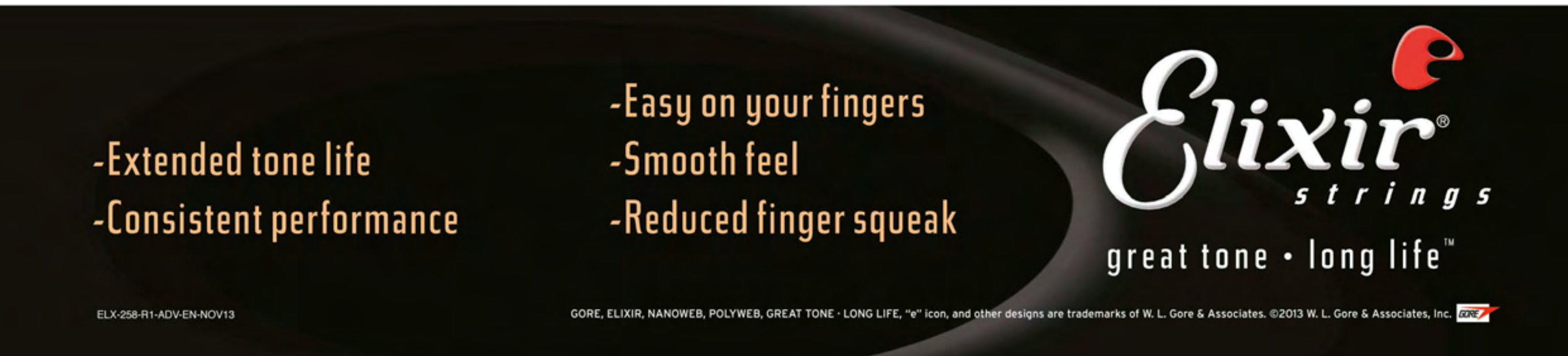

LEON HUNT

UK Banjo Expert

Leon Hunt continues to confound the stereotypes that try to confine the banjo to bluegrass, by making his living playing alongside some of the world's top musicians from a number of musical styles and disciplines. That said, he's not one to shy away from the clichés either – watch the TV for a long enough and there's every chance you'll hear some of his music. Leon has also enjoyed being part of several major theatre productions and as well as being a frequent contributor to *Acoustic*, Leon also recently completed his debut instructional package for Mel Bay, which is out now. ***www.leonhunt.com***

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TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

THE BANJO IN JAZZ

LEON'S ARRANGEMENT OF PAT METHENY'S 'JAMES'

In my last column, we took a look at the banjo's place in the early New Orleans jazz bands and the big part jazz has played in the origins and the evolution of bluegrass banjo, from Scruggs onwards. This month, we're going to have a look at the continuing developments within the world of the five-string banjo, pushing it ever closer to becoming a bona fide and accepted 'modern day' jazz instrument.

To understand the inexorable aspirations that five-string banjo players seem to have to get ever more conversant with jazz music, you first need to acknowledge the commonality that exists between it and bluegrass. Both styles are, to varying extents, improvisational or "conversational" forms of music, requiring the players to not only learn a given repertoire but to also develop a strong musical vocabulary that can be called on at will. The fundamental musical forms are not too dissimilar either; often 12- or 16-bar sections laid out as A, A, B, B or A, A, B, A and relying heavily on I, IV, V type chord sequences, although the added harmonic colour found in jazz can sometimes make the similarities slightly harder to see. Beyond that, and getting slightly more specific, there is also a fair amount of shared musical style and feel, most notably swing and syncopation. If any more links were needed to illustrate this point, you could also consider the cultural, chronological and geographical facts. It would actually be more surprising if these two musical forms didn't have so much in common. Both became popular during roughly the same period, with the epicentres of the two styles being less than a day's drive away, and if you've ever spent any time travelling around America, you'll know that's equivalent to a trip to the shops for us here in the UK.

Since Scruggs' considerable contributions, there have been several notable banjo players that have made strong and innovative inroads into jazz. Bill Keith was possibly the first to have a serious crack at jazz with a different approach altogether. Keith's "melodic" style of banjo playing certainly opened up a lot of possibilities, especially when trying to faithfully tackle more complex melody lines. The notion of "the roll", or a series of uniform right-hand patterns, was largely ditched in favour of left and right hand sequences individually tailored to achieve specific musical passages. Keith's versions of jazz standards such as 'Caravan', 'A Night In Tunisia' and 'Jordu' are all well worth a listen. While on the face of it Keith was really playing jazz, dig a little deeper and you'll notice that the price for these melodic gains were high, and paid for with reduced improvisational facility. For all the benefits this approach offered, its jazz credentials will forever be in question due to the fact that you'll need a brain the size of a planet, and preferably one stolen from a youthful, quick-thinking chess grand master to have any chance of successfully improvising within it.

Pat Cloud's attempts at jazz improvisation within the "melodic style" were impressive to say the least, but in real terms were only ever going to serve as interesting recordings for banjo players rather than anything that might satisfy an informed jazz listener. Unfortunately, his 1983 release Higher Power is no longer available, so unless you're a very keen and persistent record collector you'll probably just have to take my word for it.

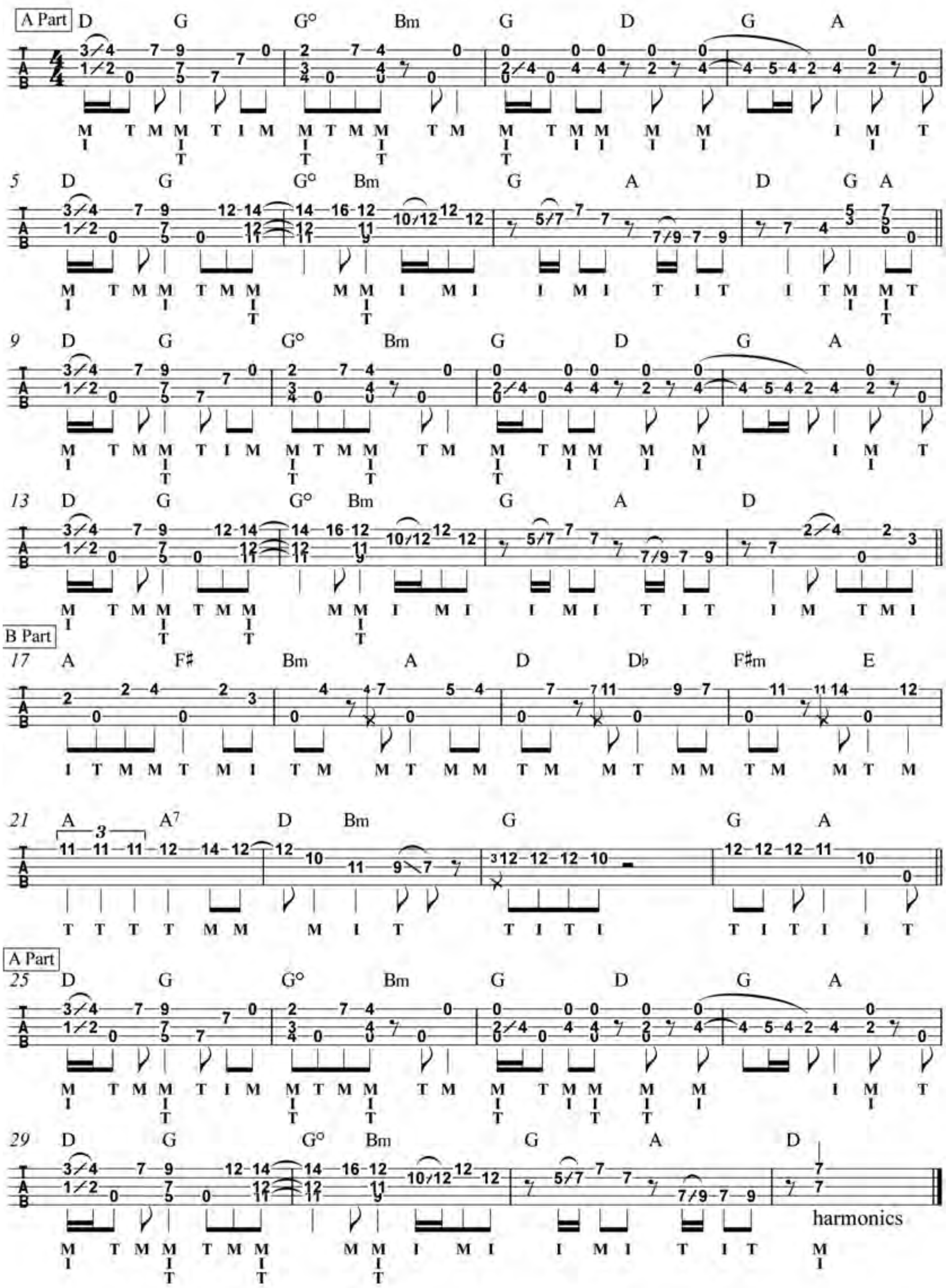
It wasn't really until Béla Fleck took up the challenge that the banjo began to have a fighting chance of fitting into real-life jazz environments convincingly. In simple terms, Fleck took everything that Scruggs did, added Keith's melodic approach, and then crucially supplemented all of this with what's now become known as "single-string" playing (using the thumb and index finger to simulate the up and down strokes of a plectrum). It's this single-string approach that provided Fleck, and just about every banjo player since, the ability to credibly assimilate the notes and expression (another aspect that the melodic style was slightly lacking in) from just about any form of music imaginable, exactly what's needed when playing jazz. His first solo album Crossing The Tracks (1979) featured a couple of jazz tunes, his own composition 'Inman Square', a simple but effective bebop style tune, and a version of Chick Corea's 'Spain'. Fleck must have

done something right as he now, amongst many other projects, occasionally tours with Corea, a partnership that also spawned the fabulous 2007 album *The Enchantment*. Before we move on to discussing this month's tab, I'd also like to flag up Ryan Cavanaugh as one to watch out for in the future. He's got some amazing new techniques up his sleeve. His three-fingered approach to single-string playing gives him unprecedented speed within the style, ideal for the frenetic jazz fusion he currently seems to be gravitating towards. As well as occasional solo and duo shows, Cavanaugh tours worldwide with saxophonist Bill Evans' band Soulgrass.

'James' is my all-time favourite Pat Metheny tune, although the version tabbed out here (taken from my 2004 solo album, Miles Apart) is probably more influenced by Martin Taylor's heavily swung take on the tune. The A section is built around what I'd describe as a gospel chord sequence, characterised by the diminished IV (Gdim) into the minor VI (Bm). Just about as "feel good" as a chord sequence can get. On the subject of chord sequences, the rationale behind the B section still eludes me. Chord progressions generally sound just "right" for a reason, and after a few years of playing and writing music you begin to get a feel for chords that group well together. After almost three decades of playing, I still can't quite work out why the chord sequence to the B part of 'James' works so well! On paper some of the changes seem completely incongruous but sound absolutely right. I'm sure there's a logical thread; I just haven't found it yet. There's a fair amount of jumping around the fingerboard with this arrangement so experiment with the best ways of getting to the notes. Approached with some care and thought, you shouldn't really need to break a sweat.

Leon Hunt

JAMES - KEY OF D



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DANIEL HO

Grammy Award-winning musician

Daniel Ho is a multiple Grammy Award winner and record producer specialising in Hawaiian music. In 2010, Daniel's solo ukulele album *Polani* became the first of its kind to receive a Grammy nomination. He has numerous Hawaiian music industry accolades, has authored eight tuition books and tours the world as an acclaimed songwriter, performer and university lecturer. Daniel was born in Honolulu, but is now based in Los Angeles.

www.danielho.com

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TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

MUSICAL IKEBANA

MELODY, RHYTHM, AND HARMONY

"Ikebana" is the traditional Japanese art of arranging flowers. Emphasising three aspects – shape, line, and form – its structure can symbolise heaven, earth, and man. The cherry blossom, or "sakura", is one of the most revered flowers in Japan. In this lesson, we will study "musical ikebana," using 'Sakura, Sakura' – a treasured folk song from Japan's Edo period. Similar to ikebana, music is also based on three main points: melody, rhythm, and harmony. You might recognise the first eight bars of 'Sakura' if you take a look at **example 1**.

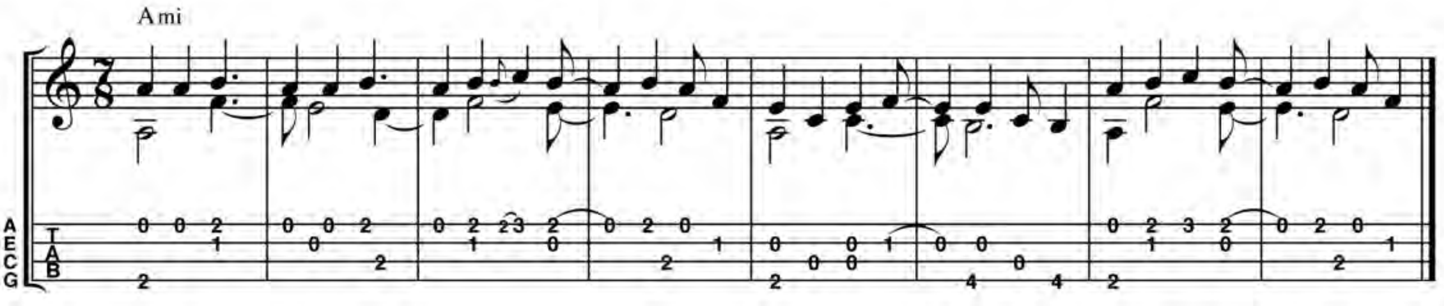
The art of ikebana is more than just placing colorful flowers in an appealing arrangement. It involves the stems, leaves, and even the pottery, which is a key element of the composition. If the flower is the main focal point of ikebana, then melody, the primary element of music, would be our flower. Keeping with this parallel, rhythm would be our "container" as it is the temporal foundation of music. Ikebana pottery comes in infinite shapes and colours. Let's explore ways we can make our rhythmic vase much more intriguing.

Disguising the obvious is a wonderful way to whet a listener's interest. 'Sakura' is in 4/4, also known as common time, the most widely used time signature in music. Let's sculpt our rhythmic vase into an asymmetrical shape by eliminating the last eighth note of each measure, making the time signature 7/8. Take a look at **example 2** to see how the melody would fall in a 7/8 time signature.

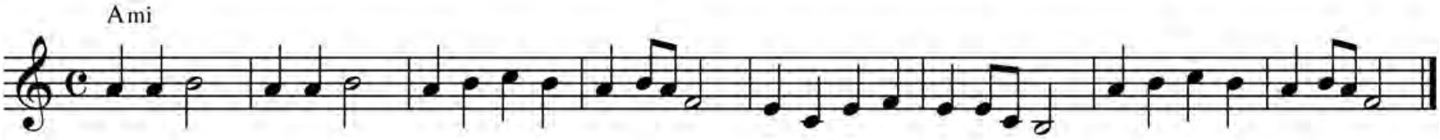
Next, let's address the stems and leaves of our arrangement – the musical equivalent of harmony and counterpoint. But, before we can place these elements, we must take a closer look at the blooms – or melody. The main theme in measure one, A–A–B, is restated in measure two to firmly establish its role as the central motif. From there, the melodic range is extended one note higher, to C, in the middle of measure three. This C note engages the listener as a fresh sound. Up until this point, all the melodic movement has been stepwise, that is, by whole-steps and half-steps. Not until the middle of measure four does the melody skip down a third. This new interval again captures one's attention as a unique sound.

In ikebana, the stems and leaves are thoughtfully placed around the flowers to create thematic shapes and lines. Let's use the three descending notes in the middle of measure three and the beginning of measure four, C–B–A, as the theme for our counterpoint. You might be wondering how we arrived at this combination. One reason for selecting these notes is that they descend in a stepwise

'SAKURA, SAKURA'

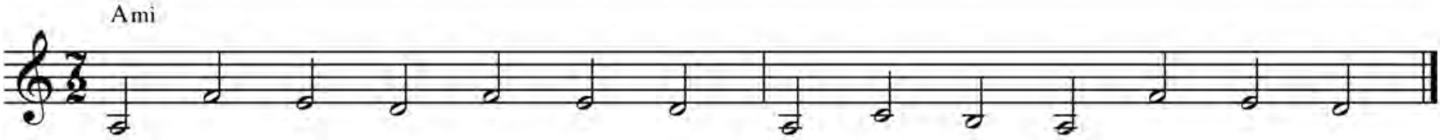


EXAMPLE 1

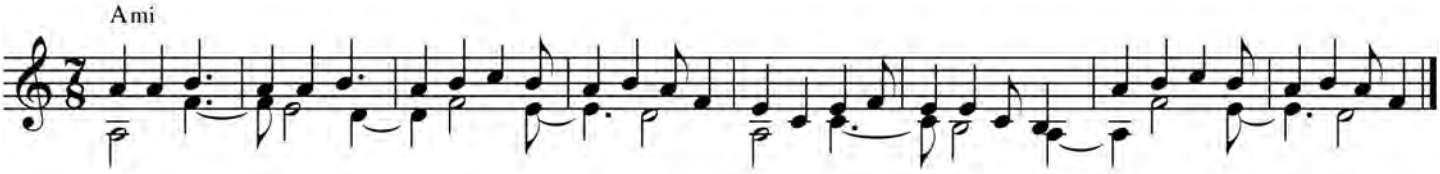


EXAMPLE 2

EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



motion. Placed against the main melodic theme, which moves in an upward stepwise motion, it creates a beautiful contrary motion. When setting this contrapuntal theme, it will be important to position the notes in a different part of the scale from the melody, so they can clearly be parsed by the listener as independent voices. We will also have to consider how the melody and counterpoint define the harmony of the song. Finally, to elevate our counterpoint to thematically zen heights, we'll compose the countermelody in 7/2, which creates a fitting polyrhythm to the melody which is in 7/8. Taking all these factors into account, **example 3** is how our stems and leaves look.

Example 4 is the melody and counterpoint together. The music is written in 7/8, which is the smaller rhythmic denomination of the two meters.

Now that we've crafted our arrangement of 'Sakura, Sakura', let's figure out how to play it on the ukulele. Due to the instrument's limited range, we must find a key that will allow us to play both the melody and counterpoint simultaneously. Fortunately, the song's original key of A minor is perfect, placing the majority of the melody on the top two strings (A and E), and the counterpoint on the lower two strings (G and C).

There is one instance, at the end of measure six, where the stems and leaves crowd our beloved cherry blossom. The melody note B occurs at the same time as the counterpoint note A. These notes cannot be played simultaneously on the low G string. Since the flower is the focal point of our ikebana arrangement, it would be best to reposition our stems and leaves in our rhythmic vase. In this case, we'll delay the note A one beat, which places it on the first beat of measure seven.

Take a look at the **'Sakura, Sakura'** piece on the opposite page. Finally, let's put the finishing touches on our arrangement. Hammer-ons and pull-offs in measures three, five and seven add vocal-like inflections to the melody. It also makes it easier to play because it requires less picking by the right hand.

Omedetou gozaimasu (congratulations)! We just assembled our first musical ikebana arrangement. With spring quickly approaching, I hope it inspires new melodies as flowers begin to bloom.

Daniel Ho

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THOMAS LEEB

Fingerstyle Virtuoso

Austrian-born Thomas Leeb plays a style he calls "the bastard child of acoustic fingerstyle." This style owes as much to percussive techniques as traditional fingerstyle guitar as his tunes are usually punctuated by slaps, pops and beats. Adding to the overall effect is his frequent use of ringing harmonics. 'What Thomas does on an acoustic guitar probably shouldn't be legal.'

www.thomasleeb.com

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

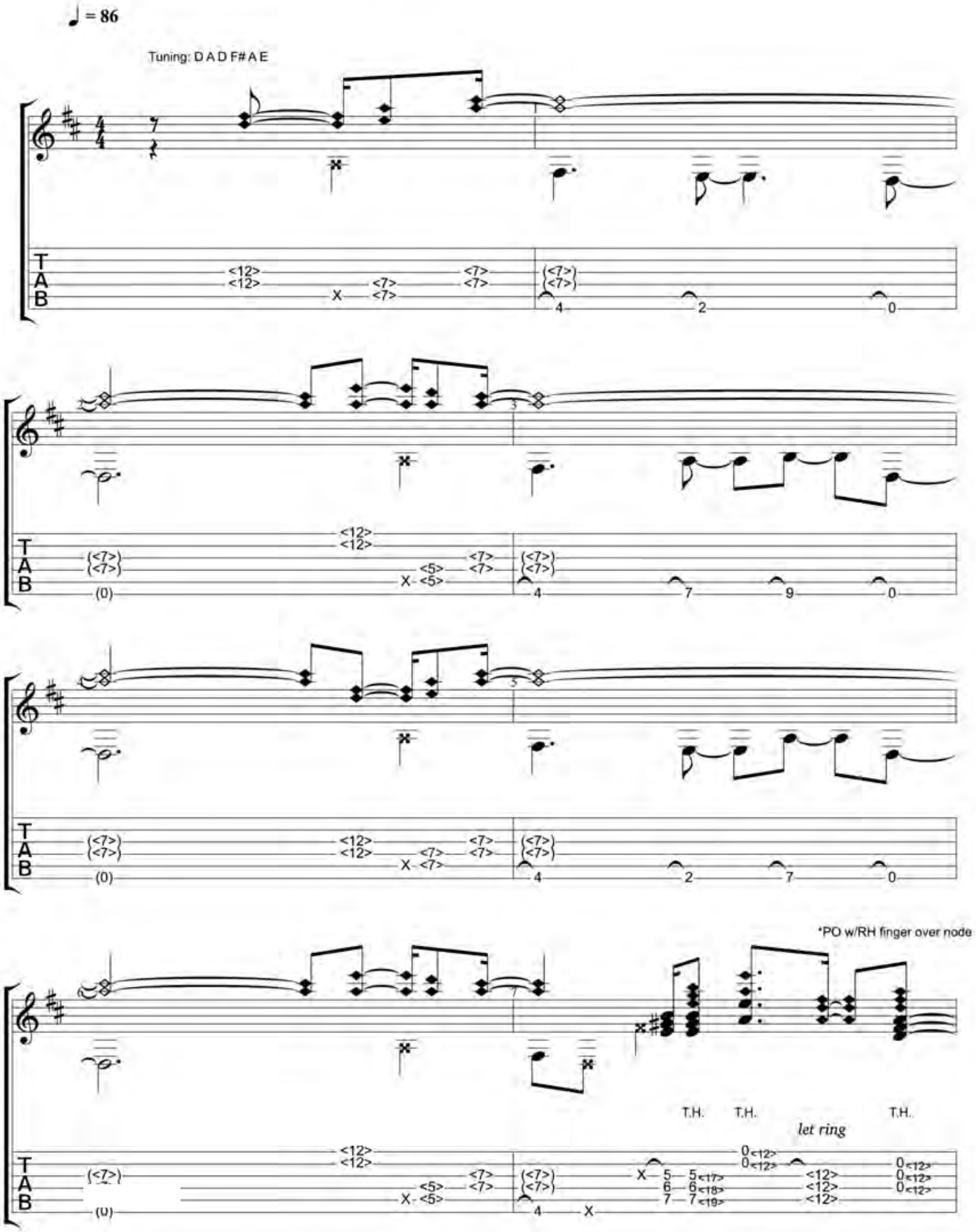
OUT ON A LIMB

A NEW TUNE FROM *TRICKSTER*

'Out On A Limb' is dedicated to my young friend Sungha Jung. The song is about taking risks just for the hell of it. Life's too short to only play it safe. Go out on a limb even if you might fall because that's where you sometimes find the best fruit!

The tuning here is the ever-so versatile DADF#AE – open D with an E on top. I've got a little crush on this tuning – a large number of the tunes on my new album *Trickster* use it.

Get acquainted with the harmonic melody in bars one through seven – this gets repeated throughout the entire piece with numerous textures underneath. The bass line here is hammer-ons and pull-offs only. The challenge with those is to use just the right amount of force. You don't want to



hammer your fingers on so hard that you end up out of tune and the same goes for pull-offs – use too much force and things just won't sound good any more. Find a healthy balance between the two.

An X on the fifth string tells you to perform a string click, usually done by clicking your thumb on one of the bass strings. In bar seven, we meet the bass thump which can be either a gentle heel-of-your-hand thump on the guitar top above the sound hole (as in bar seven) or the bottom right of your guitar.

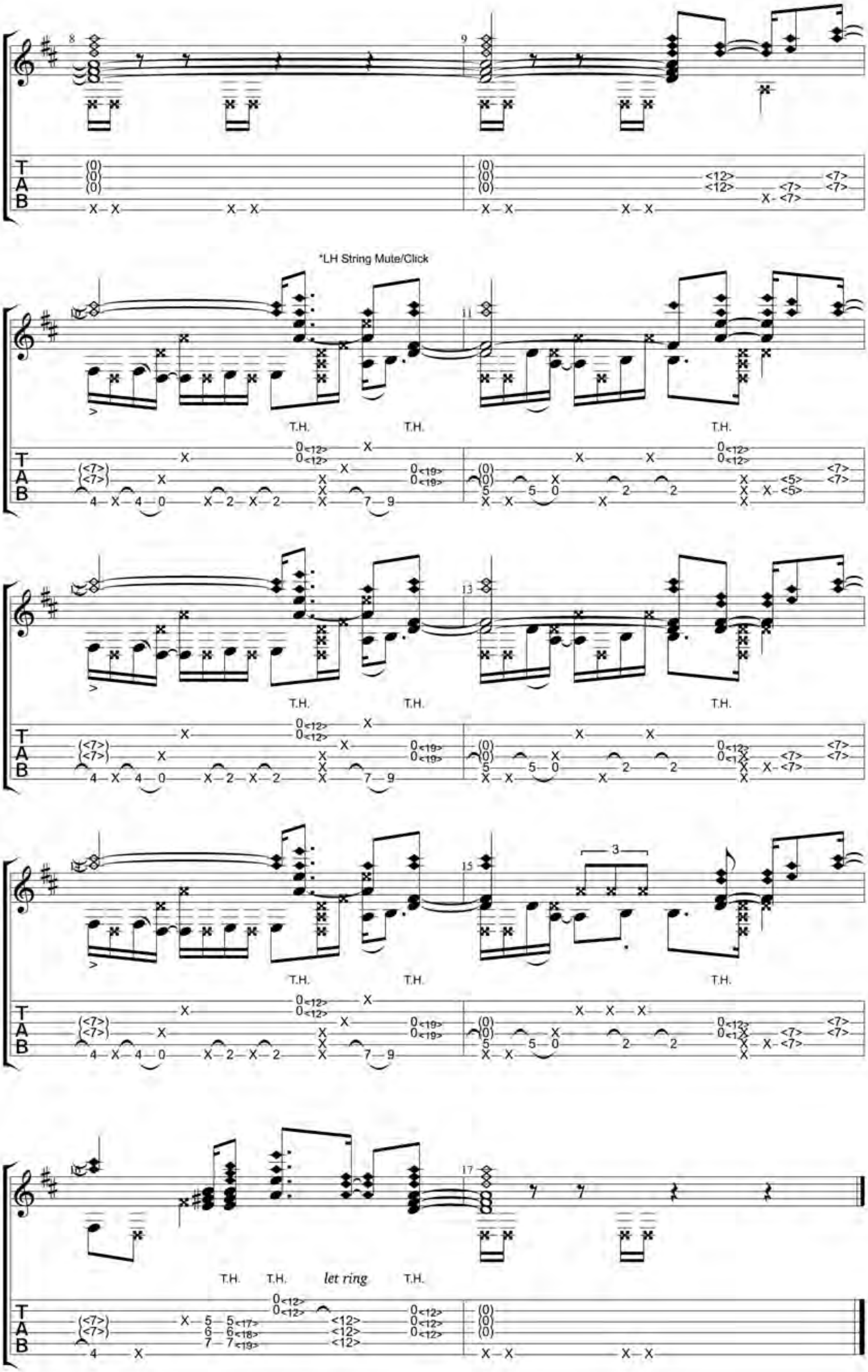
With your right hand in this position, you can slap the side of the guitar with your finger (X on string two) or thump the top with the heel of your hand (X on string four). Relax, it all looks much worse on paper.

The only two percussive things that diverge from this are the Xs on the third string – for bars 12 and 14 – where you tap the upper bout of the guitar above the end of the fretboard, and the X on the first string – also bars 12 and 14 – where you slap the side of your guitar; the bit right at your own breastbone, with your thumb.

Okay, now that this is out of the way and our left and right hands are obviously already busy, we have to resort to harmonic slaps to keep that melody going. The slap/tap harmonics are Michael Hedges-type harmonic slaps: strike (and then release) the first link of your index finger directly on to the indicated fret to produce the harmonics. Some people prefer to use their middle finger.

My brand-new album *Trickster* is available to download from my website.

Thomas Leeb



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DAVID MEAD
Tuition Author

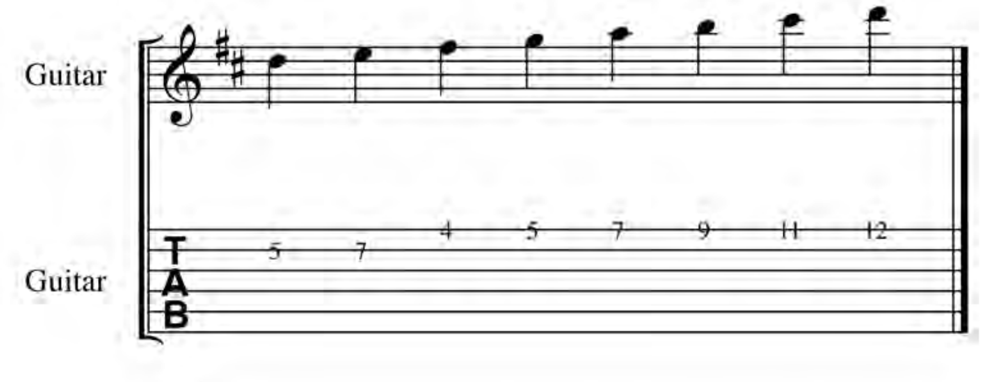
David Mead is one of the UK's foremost guitar writers, having authored several best-selling tutors. An accomplished acoustic guitarist, he has released two critically-acclaimed albums, *Nocturnal* and *Arboretum*.
www.davidmead.net

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

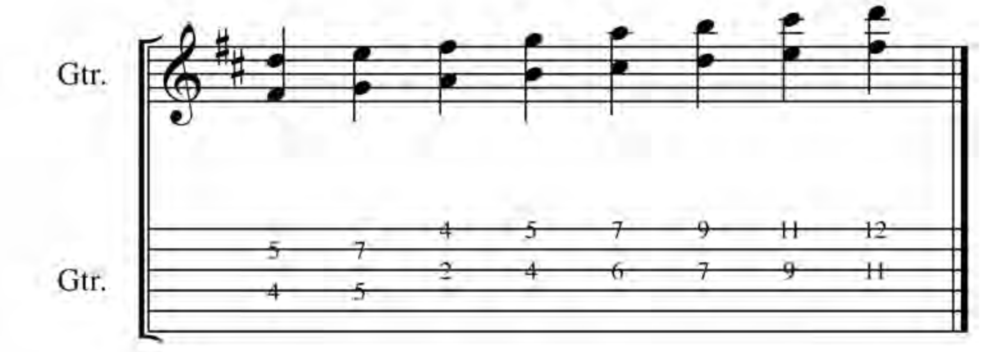
DISCOVERING DADGAD

TRES RATONES CIEGOS

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2

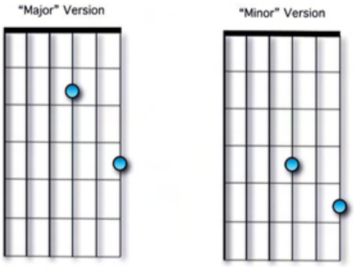


In previous editions of Discovering DADGAD I've banged on about the importance of understanding a little fundamental harmony - just a little - to advance your creative powers as a musician. I'm often asked if the great songwriters like Lennon/McCartney, Paul Simon, James Taylor and so on have studied this and I'm afraid it's often asked in that sort of "if they haven't, then I don't need to either" sort of voice. But the fact is that a lot of the time all of those top notch balladeers have studied the masters that came before them – Gershwin, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin and so on – and have learned their craft almost organically as a result. So yes, they do know all this stuff, but they might not know the official music jargon that defines it. So I'm afraid the bottom line is that all those guys are geniuses and the rest of us have to learn things the hard way!

What am I going to try to blitz your brains with this time? To be honest it's not too much to take in and I'll add the sweetener that you don't have to know this kind of thing to the point that you can recite it in class or pass an exam using it. You merely have to know that it's there, running in the background in just about every song or piece of music you've ever listened to. Learn to recognise it and, better still, employ it and the job of writing good sounding music will be a step or two closer.

Ok, so here goes. If I took a poll among music teachers as to the single most important thing to understand when it comes down to the type of harmony that relates most directly to songwriting they would almost undoubtedly say that knowing about the harmonised scale is top

EXAMPLE 3



of the pops. Sounds scary, dunnit? But it really isn't, if it's simplified down to the point where a little knowledge about the subject actually proves to be a positive, beneficial thing.

If I take a scale – in this case, the D major scale – and add a 3rd above each note we have the basis for playing melodies that sound properly harmonised. This means that you can play a perfectly respectable tune by observing this little rule and if you add the odd bass note here and there, you'd be surprised by how full and "proper" they begin to sound. This is an important first step in learning how to present a melody and once you can do this, you're well on the way to being able to compose fuller, richer-sounding material. So bear with me while I cover the nuts and bolts of the system.

In **example 1**, I've laid out the D scale that uses only the top two strings. I'd invite you to play this through a couple of times just to get used to the lay of the land.

Now look at **example 2**. You'll see (and hear) that the D scale is still there, but I've inserted a note underneath each scale tone in order to harmonise it. All this takes is two different fingerings (**example 3**) as you are dealing with just two intervals. Essentially these are the minor and major thirds related to each note. The fact that I've put them underneath the scale tone changes the rules slightly, but I really don't want to complicate things where I don't have to and so bear with me on this one for now. So what we have is basically this:

F# G A B C# D E F#
D E F# G A B C# D

Only I've inverted everything and ended up with this:

D E F# G A B C# D
F# G A B C# D E F#

So it's the same thing seen from a different angle. In all cases, the harmonised scale notes have either a major or minor third with them and if you want me to list them, then read on:

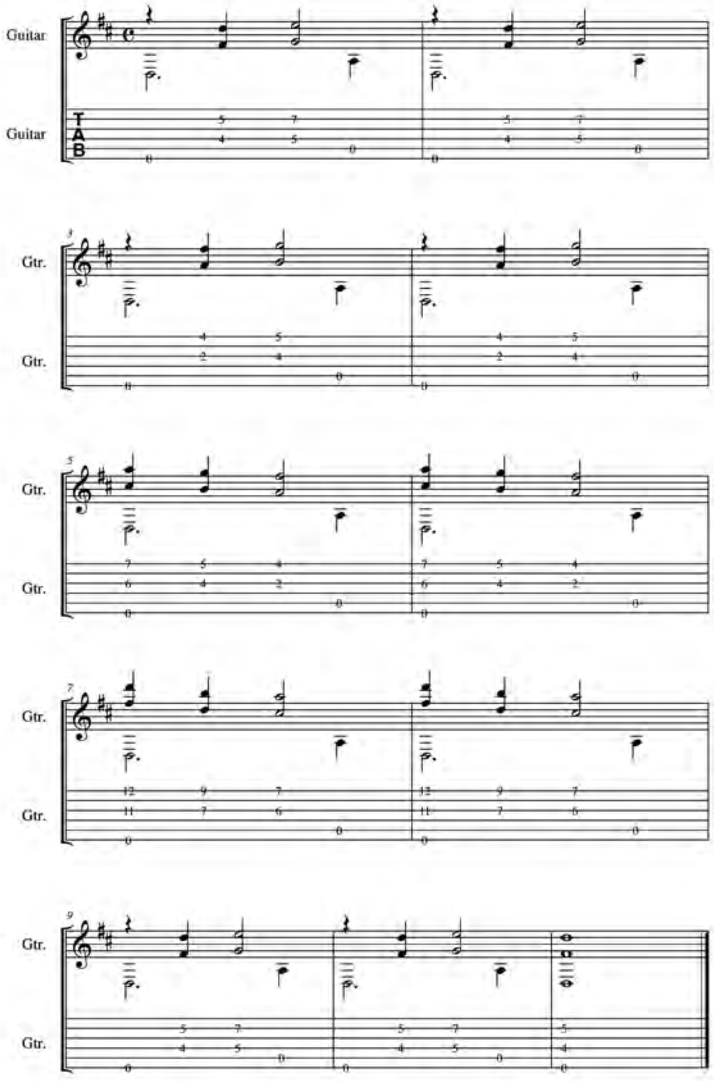
D Em F#m G A Bm C#m

If we were to go on adding more notes to each scale member, we'd end up with full chords for every single note of the scale, but we're not going to do that. We're going to stop right here, because this is already a very rich melodic database for harmonising tunes. In order to demonstrate this, I'm going to write out a little piece and add a couple of bass notes along the way to fill things out a little more. But I'm not going to get too elaborate here; in fact, I'll deliberately limit myself to two bass notes – D, because it's the root note of the scale and will quite happily sit under most melodies in its jurisdiction, and A, because it implies an A7 chord which is universally recognised as the correct musical punctuation to use before returning to D. If that still doesn't make a lot of sense to you, don't worry. The most important thing is that you hear what's going on and that the music sounds natural and somehow "right". We can worry about dissecting things later on, but for now, play through the tune a few times and listen to how it sounds. I'd advise you to take special care with the fingering of the two intervals; try to keep it as consistent as possible up and down the neck as this will make the piece easier to play.

So here's this month's little study. To me, it sounds Spanish and a bit like a variation on a favourite nursery rhyme – I guess the answer is in the title!

David Mead

EXAMPLE 4 – 'TRES RATONES CIEGOS'



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This month, I've created an exercise that is based around a triplet thumb pattern, using drop D tuning. The full tuition video is available by downloading the Acoustic magazine app – and the tablature is also available online to download free-of-charge.

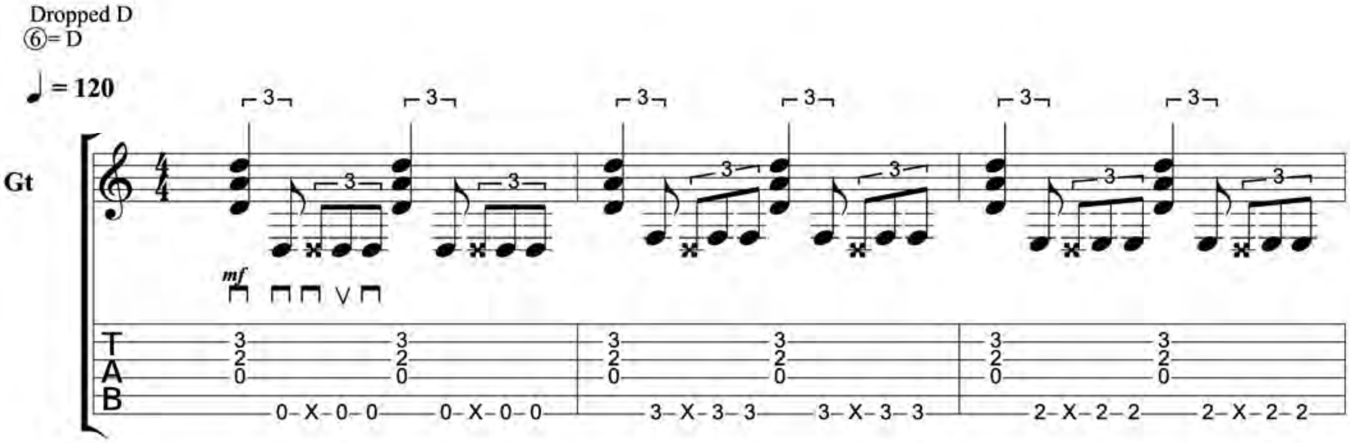
Triplets are addictive things; if you're not familiar with the word you will definitely be familiar with the sound. It is, essentially, the process of squeezing three notes into two. It's something you will have heard a million and one times, and if you spend a couple of minutes watching the video just listening to it will help you make sense of it – after all, music is about sound, so best just to listen! What's particular about how we play triplets in this exercise is the way we use our thumb. We are playing a repeated thumb pattern after playing the first two notes of the bar.

This crazy cool thumb pattern goes like this: String slap, followed by thumb up, and then thumb down! That pattern is crucial, and yes, it is a triplet pattern! Practice this pattern until you can play it blindfolded. The first two notes are very interesting, too. It's helpful to strum down in more of a flamenco style; in other words, flick your fingers out, rather than turning your wrist. This should mean that your thumb is left floating near the dropped D string so that you can play the down stroke with your thumb much more easily.

The chord shapes we are using here are relatively basic. We are using the Dsus2 shape and then moving onto using octave shapes. The octave shapes are where we should pay most attention. Make sure you lean your first finger back enough to mute the unwanted strings, but not enough to make any unwanted notes. This frees you up to play all six strings without creating any clash between the notes!

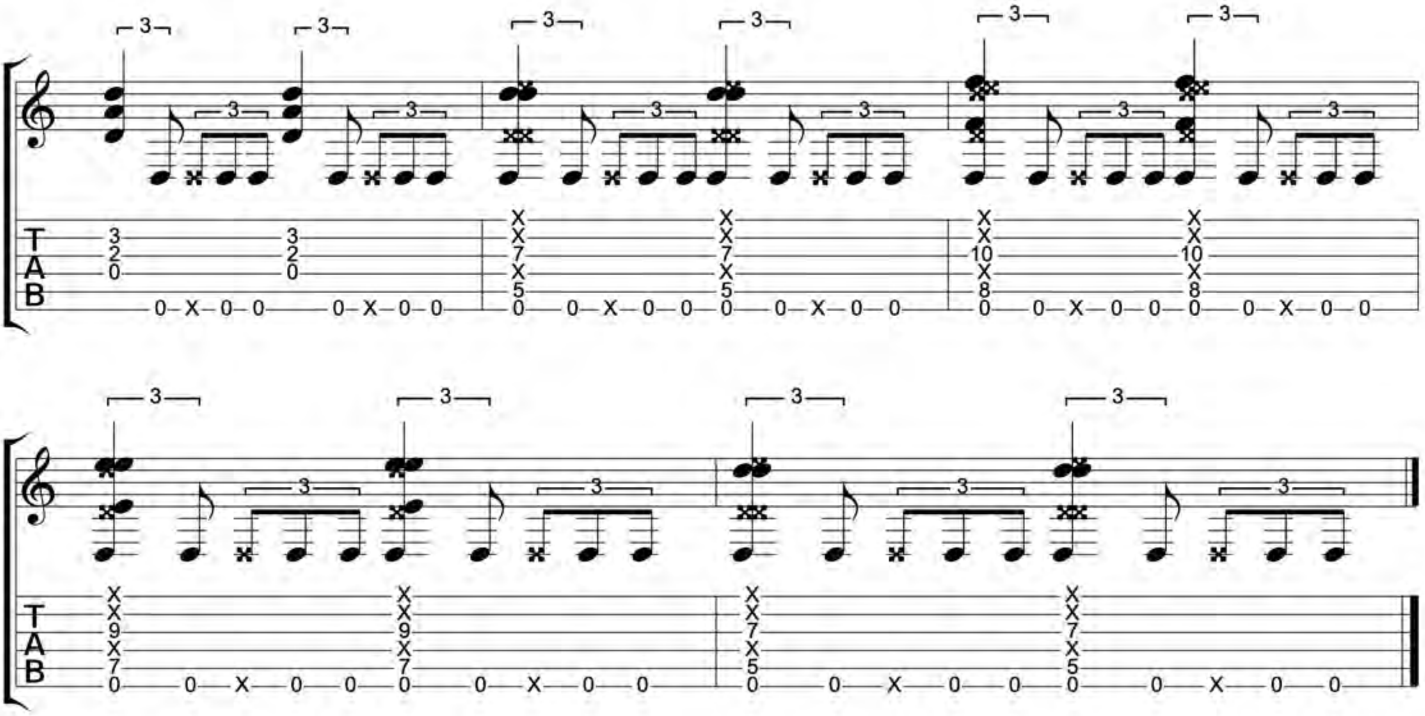
Make sure you take your time and focus in on hearing and feeling those triplets. This is really a 6/8 feel, but take a listen to that tuition video and get lost in the rhythm and sound rather than obsessing about numbers and musical terms.

Technique-wise, there are probably a couple of



new movements to you here, so take time to make sure you are evaluating how you are moving as you practice. Firstly, make sure on those first two notes you are flicking out your fingers for the strum and playing the second note with your thumb. Secondly, remember your string slap is achieved by simply turning your wrist so that the side of your thumb clicks against the lower strings, and follow this with an up stroke and down stroke with your thumb – moving your thumb from your wrist as if holding a plectrum, rather than from the thumb joint itself. Enjoy every minute and be sure to take your time.

Chris Woods



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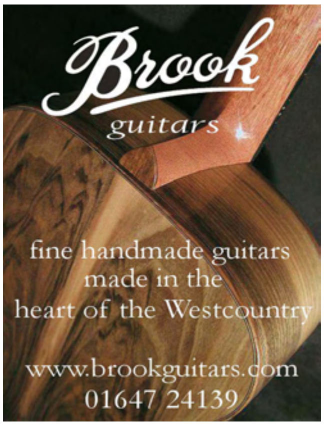

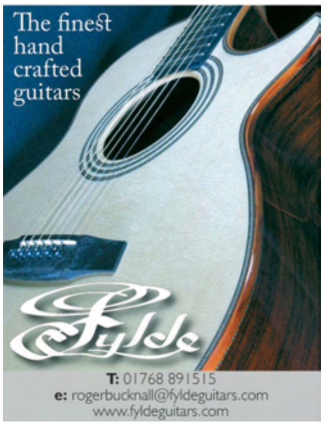

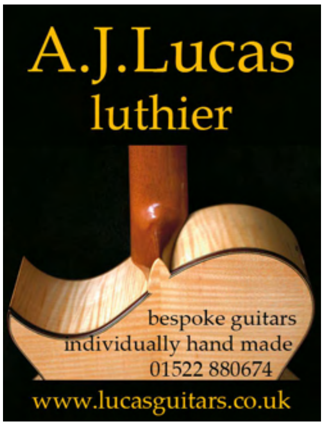

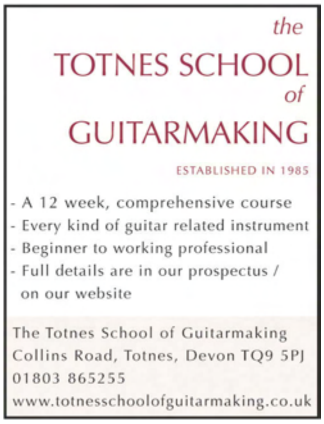

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LEGENDS

Johnny Cash

WORDS: TERI SACCONE

Johnny Cash was not only a country superstar, he was one of the 20th century's most influential artists and a music icon whose voice, presence and showmanship is triumphant even in his wake. Cash blurred the lines between country, folk, gospel and rock n' roll expertly. His sparse yet visceral guitar playing only served to enhance his epic storytelling. Johnny's rich, earthy baritone is unique and immediately identifiable. He, as well as his voice, is unforgettable and beloved.

Born J.R. Cash in Arkansas, USA, in 1932, Johnny was writing his own songs by the age of 12. He graduated from high school in 1950, moving to Detroit to briefly work in a car factory before enlisting in the US Air Force in the early 50s. While in the Air Force, Johnny bought his first guitar and taught himself to play. Upon leaving the Air Force in 1954, he moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where he played in the Tennessee Three – consisting of guitarist Luther Perkins and bassist Marshall Grant.

Cash sought to land an audition with Sun Records and its infamous founder, Sam Phillips. The deal transpired in 1955 and it was Johnny's song 'Hey, Porter' that encouraged Philips to sign him. Sun Records released 'Cry! Cry! Cry!' / 'Hey, Porter' as his debut record on the label. Philips transformed Cash from "J. R." to "Johnny" upon the release.

His second single, 'Folsom Prison Blues' reached the country top five in early 1956 and its follow-up 'I Walk the Line' was number one for six weeks and crossed over into the pop top 20. Needless to say, both songs to this day remain relevant and as potent as ever. Cash played the Opry for the first time in 1957 and was subsequently dubbed the "Man In Black" due to his all-black attire as opposed to other country stars who dressed in colourful sequins and loud costumes; more Cash hits followed.

In 1958, he attempted to record a gospel album, but Philips refused to allow it insisting that Cash remain in the country realm. Phillips was also unwilling to increase Cash's record royalties who was, by now, releasing hit singles with alacrity. Cash decided to switch labels and signed with Columbia, and the hits kept coming with 'All Over Again' and 'Don't Take Your Guns To Town'. By this time, his music was crossing over to the pop charts with great regularity. In 1960, he finally made his gospel album *Hymns by Johnny Cash*. It was at this point Cash began to suffer from career burnout, so he started relying on amphetamines to help him get through a gruelling schedule of nearly 300 shows a year. By 1961, his drug use impacted his professional life.

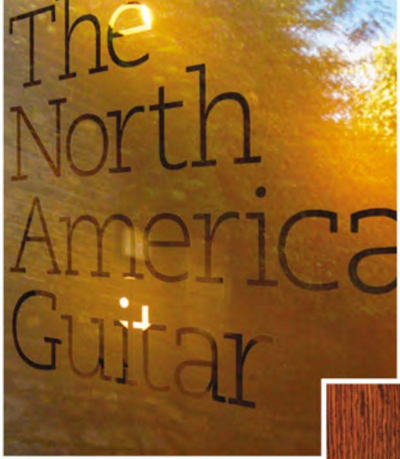
It was celebrated country singer June Carter who would reinvigorate his career. She co-wrote 'Ring Of Fire', a huge hit for Cash. However, Cash was relying more on drugs than he had before. In 1965, he became close with Carter and, with her help, was able to overcome his addictions.

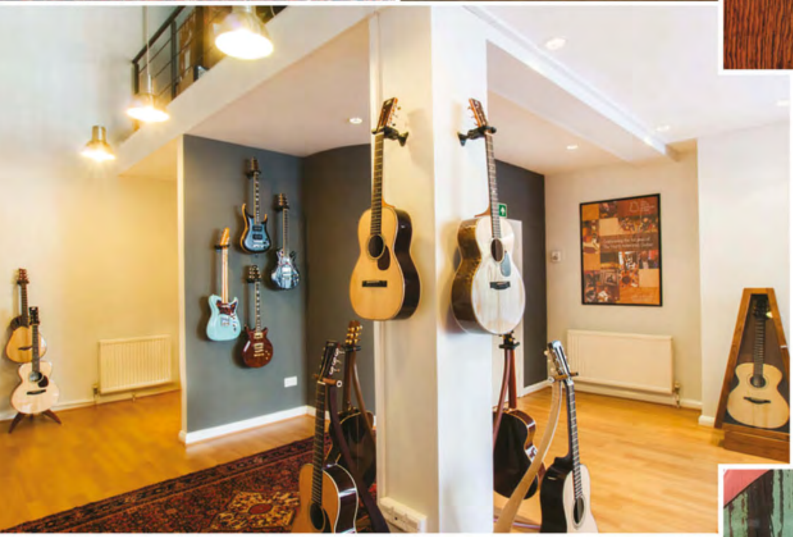
His career continued to ascend with tracks such as 'Jackson' and 'Rosanna's Going Wild'. In 1968, the pair married and Johnny released the album *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*. Recorded during a prison concert, the album was a huge success. The following year, he released another hit single, 'A Boy Named Sue' and guested on Bob Dylan's 1969 country-rock album *Nashville Skyline*. Dylan then appeared on the debut episode of *The Johnny Cash Show*, which ran in the US for two years.

Besides his network TV show, Cash continued with minor hits in the early 70s, but the 80s proved challenging as his recording career was less well received throughout those years (with exception to The Highwaymen project which teamed him up with Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, and Kris Kristofferson).

In 1993, he signed a contract with Rick Rubin's American Recordings. His first album for the label was released in 1994 and was produced by Rubin. It was a moving collection of all-acoustic songs, also titled *American Recordings*.

Health problems plagued Cash throughout the 90s and into the 2000s, but he continued to record for Rubin and played the occasional live show when his stamina permitted. Cash campaigned for prisoners' rights, was an outspoken voice for society's underdogs, and remained socially aware as he aged. June Carter died in May 2003. On September 12, 2003 – four months after June Carter's death – Cash died of complications from diabetes in Nashville, aged 71. Any fan realises that Cash was a haunted man whose demons were exorcised in his music, but out of the darkness his creativity poured forth. Cash's irrepressible musical legacy lives on as new generations discover the Man In Black: a soulful troubadour who wrote music that is both touching and timeless – and one who became a cultural icon in the process. ■





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